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GIULIO MALATESTA

A Nobel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"LA BEATA," "MARIETTA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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GIULIO MALATESTA.

BOOK III.

CURTATONE.

VOL. II.

GIULIO MALATESTA.

CHAPTER I.

FRANCESCA VARANI.

THE Carnival of the Calendar,—the Carnival of the dancing and feasting and revelling was over. But the Political Carnival was to continue yet a little while. The crowned and mitred masquers had not yet put off their disguise. The Pope, the King of Naples, the Grand-Duke of Tuscany, were still keeping up the jest. And the latter was on the point of sending off with his blessing a body of volunteers to assist in the war waged by the Piedmontese in Lombardy for the driving out of the Austrians.

There is no more memorable and touching chapter of the history of that sad period of brilliant illusions and horribly bitter disillusions, than that which tells the story of the Tuscan volunteer

expedition and of their conduct in the campaign. For nearly three hundred years the Tuscans had never so much as heard the distant sound of battle. Little warlike as it was the fashion to consider the Italians of other provinces, the gentle inhabitants of lotos-eating Tuscany were deemed on all hands the most feeble, the most effeminate, the least capable of fronting an enemy or striking a blow for the deliverance of their country. So wholly ignorant of all that war means and involves were the lads that went forth from Tuscany to contribute their share to the great work of Italian deliverance, that their enthusiasm might well have been said to equal in value the courage of an unburned child, who thrusts his hand into the flames, had not their deeds in the field proved the true calibre of their patriotism. And the record of these deeds has been preserved for us, it is to be remembered, not only by their friends and compatriots, but with little of variation by the enemies against whom they fought.

A considerable number of the small band of civilian volunteers who went to join the army in Lombardy in the spring of 1848, were students of the University of Pisa, who went captained in some instances, and in others accompanied shoulder to shoulder in the rank and file by several of their professors. At the end of the Carnival the ex-

pedition was being rapidly and hurriedly organised ; and Giulio's first care on his return from Florence was to ascertain the arrangements and plans of his friends, and to combine his own with them. It had been originally the intention of the two friends—Malatesta and Brancacci—to return together to Pisa at the end of the Carnival. But the latter, to his great disgust, had been retained at Florence by his uncle, for the express purpose, no doubt, of preventing him from taking any part in the expedition which was being projected:

Giulio had therefore returned to Pisa alone with the boy Enrico Palmieri, leaving his friend at Florence. It was but a few hours' journey at that time from Florence to Pisa ; but it was late before Malatesta arrived. So, as soon as he had deposited his baggage in his little garret chamber in the neighbourhood of the cathedral, and had snatched a hurried mouthful of food, he sallied forth to pay a visit that same evening.

He had a long walk before him ; for the house for which he was bound was at the other end of the town, and Pisa is a very wide-spread city. Many of the ancient towns of Italy give a stranger visiting them the idea of having become a world too wide for their shrunken population. But there is, perhaps, no one in the whole peninsula which does so more forcibly than Pisa. It may very

likely be the case that there is no one, of all the hundred cities of Italy, in which the number of the inhabitants has, in fact, so largely diminished from that, which was once accommodated within its walls. The once active and wealthy city, which in its palmy days bearded Popes, patronised Emperors, and covered the seas with its fleets, has now the character of decadence and melancholy death-like effeteness more legibly and unmistakably impressed upon it, than almost any other in Italy.* This is due in some degree, perhaps, to the wide extent which has been mentioned; but more probably to the nature of the inhabitants. It is to a wonderful degree a do-nothing population. It seems to the eye of a passing stranger to be composed of a great many priests, a still larger number of beggars, a few foreigners, for the most part in ill health, and a few persons engaged in ministering to their needs. The University, as was remarked in a previous chapter of Bologna, makes no outwardly recognisable feature of the place, and contributes nothing to the visible characteristics of the town.

* It may be said, however, that, although these characteristics are still those of Pisa to a great degree, the "now" in the foregoing sentence should rather be understood to speak of the time to which the text refers, than to the actually present day. To a certain degree Pisa has partaken of the general resuscitation of Italy.

The feeble vitality of Pisa is centred, especially after dark, in the heart of it, about the central one of the three bridges over the Arno, and the "Lung' Arno," in its immediate vicinity. In the remote quarters of the town the solitude and silence at the hour when Malatesta had to traverse it, is such as truly to give the passenger the idea that he is walking through a city of the dead.

His errand led him to one of the most solitary and sparsely inhabited quarters of the vast space included within the walls.

The four world-famous monuments of the old Pisan power and wealth, the Cathedral, the Campo Santo, the Baptistry, and the Campanile, stand matchlessly grouped together in a spacious meadow, surrounded on three sides by the grey city walls. Certainly no other similar space of earth's surface contains any comparably interesting assemblage of the manifestations of mediæval art and grandeur. And accordingly, during the travelling season of the year, there is no day, and scarcely any hour of any day, at which groups of pilgrims from all parts of the world may not be seen wandering with more or less of artistic appreciation across the turf which surrounds, separates, and sets off to special advantage the four superb buildings. Nevertheless, that *morne* green meadow, with its silence and great mute memories, has always seemed to me

the most melancholy spot in the melancholy city. Whether bathed in the gorgeous gilding of the summer-tide sunshine, or swept by the wintry blasts from the neighbouring Apennine, melancholy is the prevailing tone which characterises the spot. Yet it is exceedingly beautiful. That wondrous plot of meadow, with its unequalled group of noble buildings, is framed in a setting worthy of it. The city, which lies to the southward, has drawn away, as if in awful reverence, the little stir and motion it still possesses with all the sounds and movement of every-day modern life, to a distant part of its ample space. A grey, old-world-looking hospital shuts in the meadow for the greatest part of its boundary on the side of the city; and the rest of that side is made up of a few quiet houses, inhabited mainly by professors and clergy. But, on the other side, above the city wall, is seen the lovely and varied outline of the Apennine,—that spur of the great chain, by reason of which, in Dante's phrase, "Pisa cannot see Lucca,"—sufficiently near at hand for every purple and roseate bloom-tint on the hill-side to seem as if it were the colouring of the still atmosphere around the domes and warm brown-tinted walls of the buildings. So dreamily beautiful is the place, that one lingers before entering the doors, that shut out the world which decays and is renewed with the

seasons, from that world within, which the long past centuries still inhabit. So still is it, that when those doors have been passed, one feels no shock of change in stepping across the chasm of three hundred years.

From the south-western corner of this storied meadow a road runs in a southward direction by the side of the town wall, leading to that part of the city in the neighbourhood of the lowest of the three bridges over the Arno, and the huge quaint pile of the (then) Grand-Ducal stables. This track, for it is scarcely more, passes between the wall and a succession of fields and gardens, once thickly inhabited by the thousands who manned the fleets that made Pisa a formidable power in Europe. Very little frequented by day, it is at night as deserted and lonely as the mountain-tops, which may be seen from it, glistening in the moonlight, on the farther side of the sleeping city. At a considerable distance from its starting-point at the corner of the meadow, as has been described—not far, indeed, from the spot where it joins the more inhabited parts of the town on the Lung' Arno—there are two or three isolated and very lonely dwellings, small but not uncomfortable houses, the *tristesse* and distance of which from the centre of the city, and all the feebly-pulsing life of it, is compensated by the proportionate modicity of the rent.

It was to one of these houses that Giulio Malatesta was bound on the evening of his arrival at Pisa. The distant clock of the *Palazzo pubblico* was striking the half-hour between nine and ten as, crossing a garden, he reached the door, and, in the absence of a bell, made the massive old-fashioned ring which hung from the middle of it serve as well as it might the purpose of a knocker. It was some little time before a female head, partially opening one of the closed jalousies of a second-floor window, cautiously and suspiciously demanded, "*Chi é?*" * For "unsettled times" in the political world had produced their usual effect of insecurity in the social world. Bodies of strange troops, Neapolitans, and Roman refugees, rough-looking fellows at the best, *foreigners* in Tuscany in every sense of the word, and many of them half savages to the gentle Tuscan mind, had passed through Pisa; and suspicious characters, bringing with them little worse, perhaps, than the normal habits of their own districts, but terrible and shocking to quiet and peaceable Tuscan ways and ideas, were known to be about.

So the door of the lone house was carefully bolted, and the maid-servant went to an upper window, as far off as might be from the applicant for admission, to reconnoitre before opening it.

* "*Who is,*" subandi, there?

But Giulio's answer—" *Amici! Son' io,** Beppa! I have just arrived from Florence!"—was immediately responded to by—"Oh! Signor Giulio! Is it you? I'll come down and open the door directly." And in a minute, after a considerable rattling of bolts and bars, the door was opened, and a middle-aged servant presented herself.

"*Scusi!* † Signor Giulio," she cried; "since those ugly animals of Neapolitans have been here, it's wise to keep the door barred! What faces! But they say they are all patriots. Perhaps so! I don't say no; but I bolt the door. Come in, come in, *Signorino.* ‡ The Signor Professore is not at home, but the Signorina will be delighted to see you!"

"Is Signor Rinaldo within? His brother Enrico ought to have been here more than an hour ago. He came with me from Florence."

"Il Signor Enrico arrived soon after eight. He has gone out with his brother and the Professor. But come in and speak to Signorina Francesca, Signor Giulio."

So saying, she led the way to a room on the ground floor at the back of the house, and, throw-

* "Friends! It is I, Beppa."

† "Excuse."

‡ "Young gentleman." The phrase is often used flatteringly or pettingly.

ing open the door, cried, "*Ecco il Signor Giulio, Signoriña!*"

It was a good-sized room, larger and loftier, and with more of decorative pretension than a house of similar class would have possessed in England; but withal it would have impressed an English eye with the idea of very great discomfort. There was not only no fire, but no fireplace in the room; there was no carpet, and the bare bricks of the floor were covered only over a small space in the neighbourhood of the window by a piece of matting. There was a good-sized, substantial square table in the middle of the room, on one-half of which a cloth was laid with the preparations for the supper of four persons, while the other half was fully occupied by a quantity of coarse brown linen, and by a variety of paper patterns, by the aid of which that material was in the process of being shaped into garments. Four rush-bottomed chairs, so constructed as to make it appear as if the utmost ingenuity had been exercised with a view to render it impossible for the human body to assume any position of ease when using them, were placed around the table, and four others were ranged against the wall, which was stencilled with a design exhibiting a combination of the colours green, red, and white. There was no other article of furniture in the room, unless two plaster busts

of the Pope and the Grand-Duke, placed on brackets affixed to the wall opposite the door, might be considered as such. There was no ceiling, and instead of it the uncovered rafters of the floor above were visible ; but an attempt had been made to render these ornamental rather than the reverse by roughly painting them.

The Signorina Francesca, of whom the maid had spoken, was alone in the large and cheerless room, striving apparently to combine the two occupations of cutting out clothing and reading a newspaper, and not succeeding in either so well as she might have done if she had taken them singly. Both were, however, precipitately abandoned by her on hearing the announcement of the servant. The Signorina Francesca, who started forwards, offering both hands in token of welcome to the new comer, was a girl of some twenty or one-and-twenty years, with far more than sufficient attractions to make such an invitation to a *tête-à-tête* visit as Giulio had received no lightly-prized privilege to most men of Giulio's years. He, we know, was now fully armed against the assaults of any temptations of the kind. But there was a style of frank *camaraderie* in the manner of both of them, as they met, which indicated plainly enough that even before Malatesta's visit to Florence, and therefore before he had donned the

armour of proof which now protected his heart, there had never been anything of the nature of flirtation or love-making in their intercourse.

Malatesta had yielded his heart at discretion at the very first glance of Stella Altamari's eyes; and he had passed two years in very frequent, almost daily, intercourse with Francesca Varani, without ever dreaming of falling in love with her. Other men might have done just the reverse. There could not have been a greater contrast between two girls, both of them beautiful, than between the dainty, fairy-like patrician Contessa, the hands, feet, and sinews of whose forefathers for a dozen generations had never known labour, and the vigorous daughter of the people, the perfection of whose physical development showed her to be the product of a race in the men and women of which the beneficence of the primal law, called by us in our presumptuous folly the primeval cause, had not been made really such by any excess of toil or privation.

Francesca Varani, the daughter of a Bolognese mother, and of a father whose family (though he himself had been born in Corsica) came from the neighbourhood of Imola, a small town some twenty miles to the southward of Bologna, was a very perfect specimen of perhaps the finest and handsomest of all the different races that inhabit the peninsula.

Taller, larger-limbed, handsomer in feature than either the Piedmontese or the Tuscan, it is stronger, better knit, more sinewy, more alert than the Roman, and in both respects far superior to the races of the regions farther south. The people of both sexes are, for the most part, remarkable for the beauty which arises from rich and vivid colouring. Black, or nearly black, hair and eyebrows, set off to advantage the blooming carnation of cheeks, in which the rich blood mantles abundantly, and the brilliance of large white teeth set in powerful jaws, and shown by every movement of full, well-cut, and mobile lips. The sharp, triangular faces, so common on the other slope of the Apennine, are rarely met with among these denizens of a richer and more generous soil. The lower part of the framework of the face, on the contrary, is generally large and strong, with broad, well-formed chins, not carrying too much flesh, but which tell much to physiological eyes of vigour and force of character.

Of this highly-favoured race, Francesca Varani was, as has been said, a very perfect specimen. She was not a Venus, according to the ideas of the perfection of female beauty which we moderns have formed to ourselves from the refined and slender charms of a high-bred and somewhat hothouse-bred loveliness, which appeals not only

and wholly to the outward eye. She was not a Juno. The somewhat heavy majesty and the matronly forms which are needed for the completion of the conception, were not there. She might have been a Hebe, if the perfection of the presentation of physical youthfulness had not been tempered in her by a certain earnest and purpose-like bearing and tone of manner—gravity or seriousness would be too strong expressions—which did not answer to the notion of completely Hebe-like thoughtlessness.

The face was certainly a strikingly handsome one. It was large; but not more so than the height of her person demanded that it should be. It would never have entered into the head of anybody to call it heavy; but a little addition of flesh might have made it seem so. The hair was black, or very dark, fine, glossy, and extraordinarily abundant. The brow of the purest white, not lofty, but broad and square at the temples; the nose not slender but well formed, and the nostrils singularly mobile; the eye very large, dark brown in colour, remarkably well opened, and to a striking degree expressive of frankness and fearless candour; the rich contour of the cheeks brilliant with colour, not too strong to be called fairly roseate, not too full to be becomingly increased by a blush; the line of the jaw-bone well defined, strongly marked; the ear delicately small; the mouth some-

what large, eloquent with constantly varying expression, capable of a whole tempest of scorn and indignation, but equally so of infinite sweetness and tenderness; the column of the neck strong, large, round, and exquisitely white; the hand not small, but well made, long in the finger and formed with that perfection of finish that suggests abundant capability of dexterous and adroit action; the bust magnificent; the waist not specially slender, but round, lithe, and elastic. Not a Venus, I have said! Not the Venus, that is, of a ball-room, of Hyde Park, or of the Bois de Boulogne, or perhaps of a poet's dream! But I am inclined to think that Adam, if he had been duly instructed in heathen mythology, might have called her so.

"Welcome back to Pisa, Signor Giulio!" she cried, as, leaving her twofold occupation at the table, she came forward with both hands extended to meet him. "When Enrico came home, I knew we should see you to-night. My brother was obliged to go out; he is at a little meeting of our friends; but he will be home directly."

"I thought it likely that he might be out; but I could not rest to-night without seeing him. Though I have very little doubt that you can tell me all that he could, Signorina Francesca. Busy for the good work, I see!" he added, with a smile, nodding towards the encumbered table.

"Ay! such work as it is!" said Francesca, with a depreciatory shrug and grimace. "But I should have thought," she added, "that you would have something to tell us."

"I am ashamed to say I have not! I was not much among the right set; I have been doing nothing but Carnival-keeping there at Florence."

"A pretty time for Carnival-keeping, *davvero!*" rejoined the girl, with a curl of her lip; "we have been thinking of other things here."

"I know it, Signorina Francesca; and it has seemed a thousand years* till I could get back to Pisa!" said Giulio, while a twinge of conscience sent the blood to his face.

"And you have not come a day too soon! Rinaldo and my brother have been working hard; and all is pretty well ready. They both knew, fortunately, that as far as this sacred war goes, you are heart and hand with us——"

"*Altro!*" ejaculated Giulio.

"— though you *do* think, as the Professor says, that figs may be made to grow on thistles afterwards."

"The thistle, as you call it, is the tallest plant in our garden!" rejoined Giulio. "But there!" he added, checking himself, "we won't have one of our battles royal to-night, Signorina Francesca;

* A constantly recurring Tuscan expression.

there is so much to be said of what we all agree on. Has any day been named yet for the start?"

"They talk of the 23rd."

"What, of this March? So soon!"

Francesca nodded three or four times with a bright smile, adding, "And not a day too soon, let me tell you, Signor Giulio. We others, who don't go Carnival-keeping, have our eyes open to other things. And we shall be ready too!"

"I shall! that I can promise you, with all my Carnival-keeping, Signorina Francesca!" said Giulio.

"*Bravo!* Signor Giulio! But don't suppose I ever doubted it! And now there is a matter about which I want to speak to you; and we can take this opportunity before the Professor comes home."

"What! a secret from him?" cried Giulio, in surprise.

"Well! yes, and no! a secret at this moment, but one which I do not intend to keep much longer. In two words, this is it. I intend," said Francesca, speaking very deliberately, and looking him steadily in the face the while, "to accompany the volunteers to the war!"

"Francesca!"

"And as it can't do any harm to ask advice about a thing when one's mind is quite made up, I want to consult with you about it."

“And your brother, the Professor?” asked Giulio, much surprised at what he heard.

“Ay! that is just it! Pietro goes, of course; and yet——”

“Yes! knowing the Professor as I know him, it is of course that he should go; and yet, as you say——”

“There is no doubt at all about his going! You might as well try to move the Campanile as alter his mind on that point. Several of the men have attempted it. ‘What!’ he says, ‘preach a crusade for five years, and when at length there is a hope of turning theory into practice, leave the doing it to others? What! stir up boys to give their blood, their lives for a cause, and, when the time comes, sneak out of the danger myself!’ And, to say the truth,” continued Francesca, “I should be sorry that he should do otherwise. He is, as he says, as good to pull a trigger and give a life as any one of us. And what can we any of us do more?”

“And yet I cannot help thinking——”

“As the others have thought, that he is hardly fit for such a business. When every man’s hand, and head, and eye, and tongue has need to be ready to take care of himself in a hundred ways, what chance has a man whose head, hand, tongue and eye were never ready for anything? It is not

when it comes to the fighting ! Pietro will do that, I am sure, as well as another ! But it is all the rest of the time. And so the long and the short of it is, that I have determined to go with him."

"But will it not be impossible for a lady to——"

"You don't think I should dream of going in a woman's dress ! *Che!* that would never do, indeed ! No ! I shall go as one of the volunteers, in the dress of one, and take my part in all that has to be done. I, too, as Pietro says, can pull a trigger, or give a life."

"But if it is known—that——"

"It will be known to nobody but Pietro and yourself, and Rinaldo and Enrico—not a soul else. Except my mother, that is to say. I have written to her of my plan ; and have had an answer from her two days ago. She says, shortly, that Pietro would never again be a son to her, if he did not go ; that it will be a delight to her to know that she has given two children instead of one only to the cause ; that I may be very sure that I shall not be the only one of Italy's daughters in the ranks ; and wishes only that she had a dozen other such children to give to her country. *La buona fiera** *mamma!* There is a patriot, if you will ! I am proud of my mother, Signor Giulio."

* Proud.

"I am sure you have reason to be so. But what is it you want me to do?"

"Only to speak to Pietro! The only difficulty in the way is with him. I know that he will make all sorts of objections. And you have so much influence with him! He has such a high opinion of your judgment, Signor Giulio!"

"But I am not quite sure that my judgment would be on the same side as yours in this matter, Signorina. Granted that our dear Professor is little fitted to take care of himself in such circumstances, could not the duty of caring for him be performed more satisfactorily in some other way? There are friends who love him as well as you do."

"Ay! but none who could be to him what I should. Men are of little use for such occasions."

"And what says Signor Palmieri to your scheme?" asked Giulio, looking shrewdly into her eyes.

"What, Signor Rinaldo? I have told him necessarily. But I should not think of asking his advice in the matter," said Francesca, with a little toss of her head, and a slight shade of embarrassment in her manner, which had not been observable previously. "Of course," she added, "he is all against it!"

"But if, as I confess it seems to me, Palmieri

and I between us could manage to take very good care of our Professor, do you not think——”

“But though that is my principal reason for being determined to go, it is not my only one, Signor Giulio. I, too, have a spice of my mother’s feeling in the matter! I burn to contribute my mite of assistance also to the cause. And then besides——In short, I am quite determined to go, whether Pietro will consent or not; but I would very much rather that he did so.”

“And then besides——as you were saying, Signorina! What is the besides? What other motive have you for your determination?”

“Well!” answered Francesca, very palpably colouring up, but with a forced determination to speak openly, and a strong effort to do so without any apparent embarrassment, “there are others besides my brother who will need looking after, and who are as unfit for roughing it as he. Look at that child Enrico! Is he not fitter to be at his mother’s apron-string than campaigning in Lombardy?”

“But is it quite decided that he is to go?”

“*Altro!* He would break his heart if left behind! Nor does his brother wish to leave him. But you know, Signor Giulio, what a delicate child it is. His strength is not equal to his spirit.”

“And so, Signorina, you are to go as mother to

Enrico as well as sister to the Professor, besides carrying a musket on your own behalf?"

"Don't you think that Enrico needs a mother's looking after him, poor child?" answered Francesca, with some confusion of manner. "Come, Signor Giulio, I made sure of having your support!"

"But do you not think, Signorina Francesca, that your brother is more likely to pay attention to what Signor Rinaldo may think of the matter than of my opinion?"

"No! Certainly not! Quite the reverse! Besides, I don't care what Signor Rinaldo thinks about it. I don't want to speak any more to him on the subject."

As Francesca spoke these words, a knock at the door was heard.

"There they are!" said she, jumping up; "how glad Pietro will be to see you! Remember, Signor Giulio, I count on you to back my arguments in favour of my plan!"

As she spoke, the Professor, accompanied by Enrico Palmieri and his elder brother, Rinaldo, entered the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROFESSOR'S SUPPER-TABLE.

THE reader, perhaps, can hardly be expected to remember Francesca Varani; though, in point of fact, she was presented to him once on a time, twenty years ago, at Bologna. It may be hoped, however, he will not fail to recognise an old acquaintance in the Professor of Materia Medica in the University of Pisa, who now entered the room, accompanied by the two Palmieri brothers, who lodged in his house.

Pietro Varani was one of those men in whom the years from twenty to forty of their age make less marked change than is the case with most of us. All the change that there was, was favourable to those around him, and in a yet greater degree to himself. In the first place, the outward circum-

stances of his career had been very fortunate. His real and recognised scientific acquirements, assisted by the political liberalism in fashion in high places just then in Tuscany, had placed him in one of the very few positions in the world for which he was fitted. The modest emoluments of the Chair of *Materia Medica* barely sufficed, it is true, to keep his body and soul, as the phrase is, and that of his sister Francesca, together. But that "barely" was all that he needed. Some assistance towards the small sum required for his rent was furnished by the arrangement which made the Palmieri lads lodgers in his house. And what with that simplest and most effective scheme of economy, which consists in going without whatever there was no coin in the purse to pay for, and what with Francesca's active good management, both ends were, somehow or other, made to meet; the wolf was, though never driven away to any great distance, yet kept from the door, and the Professor had leisure and opportunity for the pursuit of his favourite studies.

Then, again, such men as Pietro Varani do better in the world at forty than they do at twenty. Their contemporaries at the younger age flout them; by the time they have all journeyed on together to the fortieth milestone, they appreciate and value them at their real worth. Youth is naturally intolerant. It is especially intolerant of

deficiency in those qualities, graces, and advantages, which are its own special inheritance. And in this respect, as we know, poor Pietro had been disinherited. It cannot be said that the Professor was less untoward in his person, less awkward in his manners, less absent in his mind, than the student had been twenty years ago. But the eccentricities and inelegances which in those Bologna days had made him a butt for scoff and jeering, seemed now to have become a title to the indulgence and regard of society. The women, you see, have so much to do with it. And they can be so kind, so petting, such guardian angels to such men as Pietro Varani, when once they are quite sure that they don't want to make love to them, that there is no question and no possibility of the suspicion that there should be any question of love-making in the matter. There was not a pretty girl among all Francesca's acquaintances who did not speak of her brother as "that dear, good man, the Professor," and who would not have deemed it a privilege to come and work all night to help Francesca to make him a set of shirts.

"Not exactly what your worship wants from the pretty girls, even although you are forty!" do I hear you remark. Ah! but, my dear sir, your progress from twenty to forty has probably been in an exactly contrary direction to that of the Pro-

fessor of *Materia Medica*. Your own elegant figure has become—portly—we will say; the ambrosial curls have vanished from your brow; and assuredly the good time that has been with you shall be no more, strive to resist the change as you will! But the reverse had been the case with Pietro Varani. He had been progressing, not from better to worse, but from worse to better; and that made all the difference. The positive is so little—the comparative so truly all in all to our estimates and contentments.

And, in fact, the Professor was, by that time, very far from being an unhappy or discontented man. He was, and, in a modest way, knew himself to be universally esteemed. In the world of politics, which in those days made so large a portion of the lives of all the best Italians, his name and reputation stood high. There was not a leading man among the liberal party throughout Central Italy who did not know that Professor Varani at Pisa was a man whose heart was in the cause, and who might be safely counted upon and trusted in any emergency. He had been active in creating, fostering, and developing those opinions and sentiments among the young men at Pisa which were now about to manifest themselves in action; and he had laboured among the foremost in organising the *Corpo Universitario*, which was

now about to form a very considerable portion of the volunteer force about to proceed to the seat of war in Lombardy. Most of his more immediate friends had thought that he was not the sort of man best fitted for work in the field. But Pietro Varani, though far too modest a man to speak his feelings on the subject loudly, when his abstaining from taking an active part in the expedition was talked of, and though he might be said to be a timid man in many of the relations of life, could no more have urged and excited the young men over whom he had an influence to go into a danger which he had no intention of sharing with them himself, than he could have stood by and seen them massacred without stretching out a hand to help them. He had been very quiet about it from the first, merely rubbing his hands forcibly together in the old way, and jerking his arms about a little as he said he thought he should like best to go. But Francesca knew well that nothing on earth short of absolute impossibility could prevent his doing so. And the strong feeling that he would need somebody to look after him and take care of him, and that it would be intolerable to her to be separated from him under such circumstances, had, as Francesca truly said, been the first determining motive of her wish to join the volunteer corps.

But that motive was not unsupported by more

than one other. A very strong enthusiasm for the cause, which was now the cause of all the world, but which had been, under her mother's training, the good cause with her as long as she could remember anything, was one motive. She longed to do, and to see what was done by others. She wanted to give something, to suffer something for Italy. There were many others in those days who would have given much to be permitted to do what Francesca was so eager to do; and there were several who really did it.

It cannot be denied, however, that there was yet a third motive, which, perhaps, might have been found more powerfully operative than either of the other two, if we could have looked quite to the bottom of that heart, which, frank and honest as it was, did not tell quite all its secrets, perhaps not entirely even to its own mistress. Partially it told her; and she made no secret of the information. She had very frankly said to Giulio Malatesta that Enrico Palmieri needed such caring for as she might be able to give him; and that this consideration also was a motive with her for going. Enrico needed, she said, the care of a mother. And Francesca was anxious to supply the place of one to him. Nevertheless, it was impossible not to observe that, in this maternal and filial relationship between Francesca and Enrico, there was not all

that easy frankness, and absence of all reticence, which usually characterises the intercourse of mother and son. Enrico was fifteen; but then, as Francesca very often said, he was such a mere child of his age. And Francesca was only twenty; but then, as she also remarked, she was so old for her years. Experience, and care, and housekeeping, had made her so, she declared. But Enrico, who had a mother, whom he tenderly loved, at Florence, by no means recognised any other as filling her place in any degree or sort. He did not make the smallest pretence of being animated by any filial feeling towards Francesca; and could hardly be considered to have shown himself worthy of her maternal interest. For he never seemed wholly at his ease in her presence, and rarely, if ever, mentioned her when she was absent. Specially he seemed unwilling to talk about *La Francesca* to his brother; who, on his part, was never tired of the subject.

In fact, it was no secret among the members of the little society in which they lived, that Rinaldo Palmieri was in love with Francesca Varani, the Professor's young sister and housekeeper.

Rinaldo Palmieri was some five years older than his brother Enrico, and differed so entirely from him, not only in outward appearance but in temperament and mental constitution, that it was dif-

ficult to suppose that they were, as they unquestionably were, the sons of the same father and mother. Rinaldo was as stalwart a fellow as Enrico was delicate and fragile. He was dark of hair, of complexion, of brow; and Enrico was fair. He was strong, decided, and imperious in his political feelings, as in all else; whereas Enrico was modest, diffident, and inclined to hang on the judgment of others. He was a very substantive man; Enrico had more of the nature of the adjective. Rinaldo, however, notwithstanding the difference of his nature from that of his brother, or perhaps rather the more because of it, was exceedingly attached to Enrico; and—to admit the whole truth, and tell the whole state of the case in a word—the fact that the attachment between the brothers did not suffer diminution from the very evident affection of Francesca for Enrico, joined to her somewhat overdone manifestation of indifference to Rinaldo, was an amply sufficient proof that the elder brother was a very generous and noble-hearted fellow.

Rinaldo and Enrico Palmieri were living, as has been stated, in the house of Professor Varani; and it was due to the accident in the forest of the Cascine that Malatesta had become acquainted with the Professor and his family. That circumstance had happened more than a year ago; and

an intimacy, resulting merely from reciprocal liking, had grown up between them, and had subsisted for several months, before either Varani or Malatesta discovered the circumstances of connexion between their two histories. It should rather be said, however, before Varani discovered it; for it was impossible that Malatesta should do so. He had never been allowed to become acquainted with his mother's name. Very shortly after his birth—a few weeks only—the unhappy Maddalena had been removed from Rome, where she had been confined, and cared for in her confinement by Dr. Lorenzo Bonacci, the Cardinal Malatesta's agent, and taken to the convent of the Ursulines at Ascoli, where she had subsequently been induced to take the veil. Her child, Giulio Malatesta, had from that time been brought up and educated on means supplied by the Marchese Salvatore Malatesta, his grandfather, as long as the latter lived, and after his death by the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, his father. These means had, however, been administered, in the first instance, by Dr. Bonacci, and when he also died, by the person who succeeded him in his *studio di procuratore*—or, as we should say, “attorney's office”—at Rome; and Giulio, though permitted to know that his father was the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, and that he was acknowledged by him as his illegitimate son, had

never been allowed to have any communication with his father, and had been always given to understand that any attempt on his part to do so, would entail the withdrawal of the means allowed for his support. There was, therefore, nothing whatever to indicate to Malatesta that any person bearing the name of Varani had ever exercised any influence over, or been connected with, the fortunes of him or his in any way.

Varani himself, on the other hand, had heard nothing of the hapless Maddalena Tacca, whom he had so worshipped, and so unwittingly contributed to destroy, from the date of the last letter she had written home from Belfiore. To the letter he had written in return, the result of which has been seen in that sad letter from her to Cesare Malatesta at Fermo, which has been laid before the reader, no answer had come. From that day forward—nothing. It had been ascertained that she had been removed from Belfiore, not against her own consent, by a Dr. Lorenzo Bonacci of Rome, who was easily found to be the agent and man of business of the Cardinal Malatesta. So much consideration for her friends had been shown, as to vouchsafe to their inquiries the answer that she had, by her own desire, been placed in a convent, in which it was her purpose to take the veil. Beyond this, no reply! And even if this information had been withheld, it

may be readily imagined that Maddalena Tacca's "friends"—one lone old woman, very ignorant and very poor, and one young student, almost equally poor, and almost equally ignorant of the world and its ways, and labouring under the additional disadvantage of holding a marked place in the black books of the police, that is to say—for this completes the entire catalogue of Maddalena Tacca's "friends,"—these friends, it may be readily imagined, were not likely to be able to obtain any further information, which it was the purpose of a Cardinal of Holy Mother Church to refuse.

Old Marta Tacca had died in 1835, about six years after the loss of her daughter, not killed by violent heartbreak, but quietly grumbling herself to death, firm in the persuasion, which she had reached by a process peculiar to minds of her special stamp of selfishness, that her daughter, and Varani, and indeed all the rest of the small world known to her, had conspired to bring her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

The brief history of Maddalena, ending in so entire and so painful a blank, had remained a deep-seated and ever unhealed wound in Pietro Varani's heart. Many and many a sad and solitary hour had he spent in going over and over again all the circumstances of the story, and taking to himself a far greater degree of blame than any

other judge would have awarded him, for his negligence in not having more accurately informed himself of the requirements of the law in the matter. It had never occurred to him for an instant to suspect that Cesare Malatesta had been conscious of the flaw which vitiated the marriage. And to one letter, which he had written to him at Fermo, he had received an answer, after a considerable delay, deeply bewailing the misfortune which had happened; grieving over the necessity in which he was of submitting to the will of his family; protesting utter ignorance of the present position of Maddalena, but affirming his conviction that the information given him by his uncle of her wish to take the veil was true; and ending by expressing his opinion that under all the unhappy circumstances of the case, perhaps no solution more satisfactory on the whole could be found.

Of course the name of Malatesta had remained as a deeply graven reminiscence of misery and misfortune in the mind of Varani. But especially in the absence of any knowledge that a child had been born to Maddalena Tacca, there was nothing in the mere fact of the existence of a young man bearing that name in the University of Pisa, as a student from Rome, to arrest his attention, or to lead him to guess that there was any connexion between him and the events which still

often caused him an hour of sad and painful reminiscence.

But when the accident in the Cascine had made Giulio Malatesta acquainted with the inmates of the solitary house among the gardens near the city wall of Pisa, and when he had gradually—very gradually, for he was a very reserved man, and did not make friends quickly—become intimate with the Professor and his sister, and the two young men who boarded with them, and had, as the intimacy ripened into friendship, been led to speak of himself, his position and prospects, the truth was soon discovered, to the astonishment equally of the Professor and of the young man himself, and to a certain degree to the satisfaction of both of them.

If Varani, on his side, was impressed by the consideration, that the existence and unfortunate position of this young man continued and enlarged the consequences of the misfortune to which he had contributed, yet it was a consolation and a gratification to him to know, to be kind to, and to love Maddalena's son. And although it was quite certain, that as far as any active service, assistance, or patronage went, the younger man was more competent to be of use to the elder than the reverse, yet it *was* a comfort and an advantage to the reserved and solitary

student to have the modest home of the Professor and its little social circle open to him.

On the other hand, to Giulio himself it was much to have discovered the name and condition of his mother, and the nature of the circumstances which had led to his birth. Of course there was a gap of time, from the date of the last information Varani had been able to obtain of Maddalena's departure from Belfiore, to that of Giulio's earliest recollections, which no comparison or combination of the information possessed by either of them could fill up. All that remained a blank. And Varani in acknowledging that it was so, seemed to himself as if he was confessing to having negligently and wickedly lost what had been confided to his keeping. To Giulio, however, it seemed as if the clue, which he had at length so accidentally and unexpectedly obtained, was almost all that was needed for success in ultimately discovering his mother; and his rejoicing over the chance which had afforded it to him, was proportionably great.

The Professor seemed in high spirits as he entered the room, and came forward with both hands extended to meet Malatesta.

"Welcome back to Pisa, *figlio mio*! We have wanted you; but we have done without you! We have worked hard; and all goes well."

"Signora Francesca tells me that we shall be off on the 23rd!"

"We hope so!" said Rinaldo, who had already exchanged a friendly hand-grip—almost as much an Italian as an English habit in these latter days—with Malatesta; "we hope so! But there are still matters to be arranged. I think they have been less active at Florence than we have here."

"Don't you think I have brought you back Enrico looking very well?" said Giulio. "We have frequently seen each other during the Carnival."

"Notwithstanding Signor Giulio was living quite in the *grand monde*," put in Enrico, "he used to come very often to see me, all from anxiety to know how I was," he added, with a sly glance at Malatesta, who replied by a look enjoining discretion.

"So you go with us to Lombardy, Signor Professore?" said he, turning to Varani.

"I should think so!" replied the Professor, colouring up; "what would you think of me if I did not, I should like to know?"

"Yet many friends have dissuaded him from doing so," said Francesca.

"But both you and the Professor, Signorina, will do me the justice to admit that I was never among them!" said Rinaldo. "I think the Professor is perfectly right, and I only wish that the holder of every chair in the University was equally earnest for the cause."

"Enrico goes too, he tells me!" said Giulio.

"*Altro!* I think I see myself being left at home!"

"Yes! Enrico goes with us!" said Rinaldo, more gravely. "Italy can spare none of her sons!"

"Is he not too young, and less able than willing for the work?" said Giulio.

"Less able than willing, certainly!" replied his brother; "and too young to fill the place of an older man; but not too young to fill his own place;—and that is in the front rank, and where the Austrian balls fly thickest!"

"Thanks! brother, thanks!" cried the boy, while the rich blood rushed under the delicate and transparent skin of his fair boyish face all over his forehead, and among the roots of his curly chesnut hair. "If there were twenty of us we would be all there!"

Francesca looked at the boy with a feeling strangely made up of admiration and compassionate tenderness, and her eyes became a little dim as she said, in answer to his "there:"

"Where would you all be, if there were twenty of you, Enrico *mio?*"

"Oh! Signora Francesca, you know well where it would become my father's sons to be when a blow was to be struck against the oppressors.

Would you have me elsewhere than in the van of the fight?"

"Nay, but, Enrico *mio*, the fight is but a small part, and not the worst part, perhaps, of what the volunteer will have to bear! Extreme fatigue, privation of all kinds, exposure to the weather, want of shelter;—these are the most trying parts of a campaign. And something besides high courage, Enrico *mio*, is needed to undergo them!"

"I know what all that means, Signora Francesca!" said the boy, not over-graciously; "that means, that I ought to have a nurse with me to take care of me. I know how grateful I ought to be to one who is willing to be nurse for me," he added, with some compunction, as he crossed the room to the chair on which she was sitting in the midst of the work she had been engaged on at the uncovered part of the table, and knelt down at her knee, taking one of her hands in his as he did so; "and indeed, indeed I am very grateful to you for all your kindness and all your care for me. But believe me, *cara* Francesca, you are wrong in this! Why cannot I bear what so many others—many, perhaps, not so well able to bear it, not so well in health, perhaps, as I am—will have to bear?"

"I do think that I might be of service to you, Enrico, as well as to others," said Francesca, evidently hurt by his anxiety to set aside her deter-

mination to accompany them ; “ but men are never willing to admit that they need a woman’s help till the time comes when they feel the want of it ! It is not for you only, Signor, whatever you may suppose,” she added, bantering him, “ that I have decided on this ! My proper place will be with you all, for many reasons. And I am sure that some among you approve of my determination.”

“ My opinion is that men should do men’s work, and should suffice for the doing it,” said Rinaldo, sententiously. “ And besides—is it not enough for fathers, sons, and brothers to see fathers, sons, and brothers suffering, falling, bleeding ! *Per Dio !*” he exclaimed, jumping from his seat, and striding across the room in agitation at the imaginations his own words had conjured up in his mind, “ with what heart could a man go into action if he knew that the ball that missed him might—I don’t think any woman has a right to place men in such a situation. Enrico is quite right ! But I am a great fool to suppose that *my* feeling on the subject would have any weight with La Signorina Francesca !”

“ I am sure, Signor Rinaldo, it would have as much weight with me as that of any of our other friends. But think, at all events, what is the alternative proposed to me ! To remain here with Beppa by ourselves in this lone house, with all sorts of bad people about, and not a man in the

place to protect one! I should die of fright all alone here!"

"Nay, Francesca," said the Professor, "you might go to our mother. I could easily find the means of sending you to Bologna."

"*Grazie!** Pietro. Yes! I think I see myself creeping into the old house to ask my mother to take care of me, after telling her that I was going to join the volunteers, and getting such an answer as I did from her! A pretty sort of reception I should get, and a pleasant sort of life I should have of it with *la mamma* under those circumstances! And she telling every Romagnole liberal that came to the house the story of the patriot girl, whose zeal was hot as long as it was all talk, but whose courage melted away as soon as it came to deeds! No! *Grazie!* I should have thought that you knew *la mamma* better than that, Pietro!"

"Or you might join La Palmieri at the convent at Pistoia. I doubt not that we could make arrangement with those sisters."

"Pietro! Are you dreaming? And what a pretty dream, *davvero!* I, Francesca Varani, in a convent! *Ti pare?*† My notion is that I should be coming after you, turned out of the convent, in a very short time!"

* "Thanks." The word is constantly used thus ironically.

† "Does it seem to you?" A very common phrase to indicate that the speaker deems a proposition an opinion utterly absurd.

"In short, Francesca, you are determined to have your own way. '*Varium et mutabile semper femina*;' that is, only as long as she is not opposed. Oppose her, and you make her as unchangeable as fate!" said the Professor. "What does our friend, Signor Giulio, think on the subject?"

"I do not think," said Giulio, thus appealed to, "that I should feel quite as Rinaldo feels on the subject. I think my arm would be stronger, not weaker in the fight, if—supposing that—I mean, in such a case as that contemplated by him. This much, however, at all events, I see clearly, that the Signora Francesca will go with us to Lombardy. And I can say, from my own knowledge, that she will not be the only one of her sex who will wear the uniform."

"Thanks, Signor Giulio!" said Francesca, giving him a nod and a bright smile. "And now, Signori," she added, "if you mean to have any supper to-night, it is time to sit down. Must I clear away all this work to make room for you, Signor Giulio, or will you be content to share this side of the table with me?"

"The place is too pleasant a one to be refused, Signorina! But, to say the truth, I had my supper immediately on arriving. I would not have done so, if I had not thought that you would all have supped already. But I can't say good night till I have heard from the Professor all

that has been done since I have been away, and how things stand, and what has still to be done, and what the prospects really are of being able to get off by the 23rd ? ”

“ If we are to be of any use,” said Rinaldo, “ it is clear that, ready or not ready, we must not delay. The news from Lombardy shows that the army is in a position which makes it now or never with us ! ”

“ I have done my part ! ” said Francesca ; “ or, at least, have very nearly done. These are the last four of the twenty *blouses* I had to make, besides those for our own party ! ”

“ One for the Professor, one for Rinaldo, and one for Enrico. That makes twenty-three *blouses* for your contribution ! ” said Giulio, with a meaning glance at Francesca.

“ Yes ! Signor Giulio ! ” answered she, returning his look, “ and one more for another person, and that makes twenty-four ! ”

And then, while the frugal supper was eaten, Giulio obtained the information he had asked for ; and the hopes and fears connected with the great subject which was then occupying every Italian heart and head were discussed with an enthusiastic confidence in the result, which Giulio Malatesta alone of the little party was unable altogether to share.

CHAPTER III.

THE MARCH.

ON the 23rd of March the body of volunteers composed of the students and professors of the University of Pisa—the *Corpo Universitario*, as they were called in the camp and in the histories of that memorable campaign—started on their march for Lombardy. The Tuscan contingent, of which they formed part, consisted of 2660 soldiers of the Tuscan army, and of 2207 civilian volunteers—total, 4867 men. Of these latter, of whom the *Corpo Universitario* from Pisa formed a notable portion, the General* under whose command they were placed wrote afterwards—“The many good, burning with patriotism and enthusiasm, were inspired with every honourable senti-

* General Laugier.

ment. The few bad were desirous only of vagabondising and plundering, and but little inclined for fighting. But all were more or less intolerant of discipline." The start was at last made in such ill-regulated haste, that not only were a variety of things necessary for a body of troops in the field forgotten, but even the munition furnished was, in many cases, found unfitted for the calibre of the arms for which it was intended to serve! Of the leaders under whom the student body marched, the authority already cited declares that, "though all of them were distinguished, and, indeed, profoundly learned men, they had nothing whatever of the military character or knowledge about them, save bravery, honour, and their uniform!"

Malatesta had joined his friends at the Professor's house over-night, as they had determined to keep together, and they had feared that they might miss each other in the confusion of the departure the next morning. Five individuals, therefore, came forth that bright March morning from that lone house among the gardens—five without counting Beppa, the servant, who had instructions to lock the house behind her, and carry the key to a brother professor, to be left in his charge till the owners should return.

Francesca had cut her hair short, and in the blouse and foraging cap might well pass muster as

a lad of eighteen or nineteen. She was entered on the roll as Francesco Varani, and passed as a cousin of the Professor. If in her case, as in that of others, suspicion of the truth may have existed, delicacy of feeling, and respect for the motives which must have been the cause of her being where she was, prevented any idle tongue from busying itself with speculation or inquiries on the subject. The only persons who were really in possession of the secret were the four who have been seen discussing the expediency of the measure.

The unwonted attire suited the style of Francesca's beauty, and set off to the best advantage her height, regular features, and brilliant colouring. It was impossible not to be strongly impressed by the very striking beauty of her face and figure. Our faith is complete in the entirety with which her heart and mind were occupied with the high hopes and interests of the cause in which she was engaged. But it is nevertheless scarcely to be credited that the picturesque little *berretta*,* which, though exactly the same as that worn by every one of the volunteers, looked in her case the perfection of coquettish prettiness, had not been tried before the glass a little more this way or a little more that way on the pretty head before the set of it was definitively chosen; and the band and buckle

* The military cap.

which confined the blouse gracefully at the waist, arranged with due attention to the charming effect it so successfully produced.

Who believes that Joan of Arc took no thought for the shape and putting on of her helmet?

Impossible that the young men who were to be her companions were not much struck by her appearance among them, when she joined them on that fateful morning for the first time in her travestied costume. But the manner of her reception by them was very characteristic—it may, perhaps, fairly be said, *nationally* characteristic—of the right-minded feeling of respect for the motives which induced her so to appear among them, and of delicate appreciation of the shade of offensiveness that might be found in too open a manifestation of admiration. It might have been supposed that such a metamorphosis would have been made an occasion for some little pleasantry and bantering, or at least for some complimentary observations, on the part of the knot of young men. But it was not so. Enrico alone could not refrain from exclaiming, as she came into the room in which the same little party had been assembled at supper a few days previously, “*O! come siete bella cosi!*” * Who would have thought La Francesca was so much taller than I!”

* “Oh! how beautiful you look in that dress!”

But his brother had answered gruffly and almost savagely: "*Qui non si tratta di bellezza, ve', ragazzino mio! e qui non c'è La Francesca. Oramai bisogna avere altri pensieri per la testa!*"*

"*Rinaldo dice bene!*"† said Francesca, without a smile, and blushing but slightly, as she frankly stretched out a hand to each of them. It was the first time she had ever called him "Rinaldo," without the adjunct of the "Signore." And he understood right well—*pur troppo*,‡ as he would have said himself—that the frank familiarity indicated no shade of diminution of the distance between them, as between man and woman, but only the footing of comradeship, on which they were to stand during their campaigning life.

Francesca, however, had duly appreciated, and been grateful for the delicate consideration, which was hidden beneath Rinaldo's roughness; although it would be too much to affirm that Enrico's indiscretion had been displeasing to her.

"Yes! Rinaldo speaks well!" said Giulio, gravely, as he in his turn shook hands with Francesca; "we must teach our tongues to recognise our comrade."

* "There is no question of beauty here, mark, my lad! And there is no Francesca here! Henceforth we must have other thoughts in our heads!"

† "Rinaldo says well."

‡ "But too well."

"I wonder," said the Professor, "if we shall be expected to march in regular file, as the soldiers do? I hate walking close behind a man only one step in front of me," added the worthy botanist, showing his military aptitudes as he spoke, by attempting to sling his knapsack beneath his arm, as he had been wont to carry his tin-case of botanical specimens.

"No! that won't do, Professor! Try it this way!" said Giulio, smiling, as he showed Varani how to manage the unfamiliar article.

And then they proceeded together to the muster-place, where their arms were to be distributed to them. For that had been left to this last morning of their departure. There was a great deal of confusion, too, connected with the necessary arrangement of the companies and squadrons.* The latter consisted of twelve men each, under a corporal. Varani had been named to this dignity in the first instance. But, at his urgent instance, the Professor had been allowed to decline the greatness thus thrust upon him, and the choice had fallen upon Giulio Malatesta in his stead. And the remaining four of our little party had no dif-

* The word is used as the only available translation of a "squadra," which is the term by which the small knots of men into which a "company" is divided in the Italian army are known. In our army there is no such division; and, therefore, no term representing it.

faculty in getting placed together in the same squadron under his orders.

All the business connected with these arrangements had to be done by men wholly ignorant of all such affairs, with men as entirely new to the work, and possessing very small notions of the nature of military discipline, and of the precision of obedience requisite to prevent an army from becoming a mob. Even the commander-in-chief* found his distinguished mathematical science of no avail to supply the place of so much as a corporal's knowledge of the art of war; and the other superior officers, who were as profoundly ignorant of military matters, had a very hard time of it that morning, and were more than once tempted to think that the *Corpo Universitario* of volunteers, however anxious every man of it was to find himself face to face with the enemy in Lombardy, would never get started on its first day's march towards that object. It was late in the day before the little column did at last get itself into marching order, and pass out of that same gate of Pisa, from which so many a daily and nightly expedition went forth in past centuries against neighbouring, and in the good old time almost always hostile, Lucca.

And all this work and confusion had to be got through beneath one of those searching March

* Il Professore Mossotti.

suns so little liked by the Italians, whose proverb declares that, "*Sole di Marzo è Sole del Diavolo!*" And the untried volunteers, unaccustomed many of them to any severer exercise than a lounge on the Lung' Arno of Pisa, were pretty well tired out before their day's march had begun. Under these circumstances, the distance performed that day was a ridiculously short one; and their halting-place for the first night was among neighbours and friends, of whom some were personally acquainted with many of the men engaged in an expedition, with the scope and object of which the whole country-side in that district warmly sympathised. The same might be said of nearly the whole of the country the Tuscan volunteers had to march through. But there were exceptions; and the students had to discover, before they reached the seat of war on the Mincio, how very material a difference the disposition of the inhabitants could make to a body of men on the march.

Had grim old Radetzky, or any one of the officers of his well-appointed staff, been there to watch that start and first day's march from Pisa, those distinguished warriors would have scoffed yet more loudly than they did at the notion of these boys coming out from their books and lecture-rooms to drive their veteran battalions across the Alps! And they would doubtless also have been

yet more astonished than they were at what came of their sublimely unconscious excess of audacity!

But to any other than an Austrian eye, there was something more than commonly touching in the sight of that little band of youths, freighted with the sighs and terrors as well as with the pride of so many mothers, setting forth on their arduous enterprise!—something touching in the undoubting enthusiasm of their high hopes; and very touching in the extremity of their inexperience, and the profoundness of their ignorance of the nature and extent of the task to which they had devoted themselves.

They took their way across that rich plain, soaked with the blood of so many generations of their forefathers, fighting out the never-ending quarrels between city and city, which prepared Italy for the yoke they were now striving to throw off; they wound around the base of the Pisan mount, which separates the old Ghibeline city from Guelphic Lucca; and halted for the night at a little town a small distance beyond the latter city.*

The first day passed pleasantly enough, and, on the whole, even agreeably, for the volunteers in general, and for the little party of five in whom we are more especially interested. The march was so short, that the bustle preparatory to the starting

* Pietra Santa.

had been the most fatiguing part of the day's work. The weather was fine. Everybody was in high spirits; and the excitement of finding themselves at last fairly embarked in the enterprise which had so long filled all their thoughts and stimulated all their imaginations, would have been sufficient to render them insensible to a much greater degree of fatigue.

To Francesca, in her meditations on the details of the enterprise in which she was engaged, as far as her imagination had enabled her to picture them to herself, this first day's experience had naturally been an object of some apprehension. But it had passed better than she had ventured to hope. She had had to endure, with such assumption of indifference as she could muster, many a glance of inquiry and curiosity during the hours that had preceded the departure; she had had to exchange many a grasp of the hand with friends of her brother, who were to be made acquainted with his recently arrived cousin from Bologna; and she had more especially to enter into relations of comradeship with the other members of the squadron which marched under the orders of Corporal Malatesta. But all this had passed without any cause of embarrassment, or any reason to imagine that any of the persons with whom she was called upon to come in contact conceived the slightest sus-

picion that she was other than she appeared to be. It is very possible that some of those who had been specially engaged in the enrolment of the body of volunteers, may have had some reason to suspect the truth. But, if such were the case, no slightest symptom of any such suspicion was suffered to become apparent.

To ignore that which one is not intended or wished to know, is a special Italian accomplishment and habit.

So the short march passed gaily enough. The Professor was in unusually high spirits. Malatesta, too, seemed happier, and in a more expansive mood than was usual with him. As for Enrico, he seemed absolutely intoxicated with delight. He could scarcely restrain his limbs to the sober moderation of the marching step, and would toss his musket from shoulder to shoulder to show how entirely unoppressive to him was its weight. Only Rinaldo seemed ill at ease, and appeared annoyed at all Francesca said or did;—annoyed at her frank comrade-like bearing to himself;—annoyed still more when his evident crossness drove her to confine her conversation, as they marched, to the others near her;—and most annoyed of all at the evident air of protection and care which she, probably with the idea of justifying the reasons she had assigned for her being with them, already affected with regard to Enrico.

And Francesca saw all this, and perfectly well understood the cause and meaning of it all. But the one or two words, or even the glance of the eye which would have remedied Rinaldo's ill, and rendered him as blithe as the lightest-hearted boy who was then on his way to meet an Austrian bullet, Francesca was unable, perhaps unwilling, to give him.

But for the great majority of the lads bound on this holiday-making excursion for the liberation of Italy, that march around the base of the *Monte Pisano*, as the lengthening shadows of the winding column crept farther up the slopes to their right, was a pleasant promenade enough. And the graver and more serious spirits discussed the future prospects and organisation of the country; and the lighter recounted tales, that went to show the easy vincibility of the detested Austrian, whom the general opinion appeared to represent as a ferocious giant indeed, but a stupid sort of giant too, easily to be discomfited by a deft giant-killer who dared to beard him. And many sung patriotic songs as they marched; and no shoulders were yet galled by the musket, and no withers yet wrung by the knapsack, and no feet blistered by ill-fitting shoes. And rations were plenty at night; and everybody vied in making much of the young heroes who were going to chase the Austrians; all, or almost all, slept in beds that night; and the poor boys

found campaigning quite as delightful as they had pictured it to themselves.

But campaigning, like life itself, is apt to disclose its sterner and less holiday aspects as one gets farther into it. The volunteer column was bound, in the first instance, for Modena. Kindly, gentle, homely Tuscany had to be left. The Apennine had to be crossed. The day's march had necessarily to be lengthened, if only from the necessity of reaching some quarters for the night. The discovery had to be made of the altogether incredible difference between marching in fine weather and in bad. Quarters had on more than one occasion to be found in places where the inhabitants, or at least those in authority among them, were more or less openly disaffected towards the volunteers and the object they had in view. And it had to be discovered how great a difference this, too, made in the aspect of things, when the column reached its resting-place, weary and worn with a long day's march;—or at least with a march which was so to a body composed of such elements.

Muskets and knapsacks were found to be no longer easily carried when they had made their marks on the unaccustomed flesh, and when the way lay for long hours of unbroken ascent up the steep flank of the Apennine! Wearily the somewhat surprised, but in no wise disheartened column

plodded its way over the pine-covered mountains on the Tuscan and Modenese frontier.

One night, after a longer march than usual, the column reached a small village among the hills of the Garfagnana.* The day had been rather a trying one; not, perhaps, to more experienced campaigners, but the unseasoned Tuscan boys had found it so. They were weary and footsore as the sun went down, earlier by a good half-hour than it would have done at home in Pisa, behind the lofty marble mountains between them and the Tuscan sea. Nevertheless, though there was a good deal of straggling, and it was impossible to prevent the men from falling out to drink at every roadside fountain supplied by the mountain rivulets, and worse still, from entering the few little hill *osteriet*† on the route in search of a drink of wine, the little column was still in good heart, and chatter and singing still helped to keep up their spirits. But as the sun went down, while they had still two or three miles to march, heavy clouds began rapidly sailing up towards the zenith from the tops of the Apennine range to the eastward, and a fast cold rain began to fall. The songs soon died away;

* A mountain district so called, belonging to Tuscany, but separated from it by a portion of Modenese territory, and lying to the north of the little city of Massa.

† Taverns.

the chattering did not last much after them; and the men plodded on in silence to no more enlivening accompaniment than the slushy tramp of their feet in the mud. Then those who marched in the rear began to understand the advantage of being forwarder in the column, and thus doing their work on less deeply trampled soil.

Malatesta's squadron marched towards the rear of the column; and the labour of carrying knapsack and musket over those two last miles of ankle-deep mire at the close of a long day, might have been found trying by older troops.

Nevertheless, the little party of five held up bravely; nor did either of the two weaker ones, whose joining in the expedition had been a matter of question, admit for an instant the thought that it would have been better if they had listened to the counsel which would have dissuaded them from doing so.

As for the Professor, his cheerfulness seemed to rise with the demands made upon it. For his part, he declared that mud under foot was less troublesome than dust all over. Rain! of course they must have rain! Where would they be, when next autumn came, if there was no spring rains? Then he explained very satisfactorily to the intelligence, though with less success as regarded their immediate consolation, why more rain must be expected

in mountainous districts than in the plain. Notwithstanding which, he persisted in prognosticating a beautiful day for the morning; and trudged cheerily onward, the only talkative one of the party, under the load of two muskets; for when the rain and the spirits of the rest of them had begun to fall together, he had insisted on carrying Enrico's musket for him, quite as much to the boy's mental annoyance as to his bodily relief.

Francesca stood the work, in truth, better than he did. She had absolutely and peremptorily refused to give up her own musket to Rinaldo, declaring, in reply to his reiterated entreaties, that she felt no fatigue comparable to what she had anticipated, and that she had not come there to add to the difficulties and burdens of others.

In somewhat less than an hour's march under the rain, the little town which was to be their resting-place for the night was reached. It afforded but small and insufficient means of accommodation; but, fortunately, the people were well disposed towards the volunteers, and, as the weary column straggled into the piazza of the place, they came out from their houses, and vied with each other in offering everything in their power which could contribute to the comfort of the men. Nevertheless, no better shelter could be found for a large portion of them than the large

council-chamber and one or two other empty rooms of the *Palazzo pubblico* of the little town. An abundance of clean straw was carried into these rooms, and there the wet and tired volunteers were glad enough to rest their limbs and sleep. It was not a very pleasant thing, however, for delicately-nurtured lads, as most of the *Corpo Universitario* were, to lay themselves down in their wet clothes on an allowance of floor about two feet and a half wide for each man, there to simmer in an atmosphere loaded with the damp that would arise from the united mass of wet garments!

"This is impossible!" said Rinaldo, in a low tone to Francesca, as soon as they saw the place, and understood the nature of the accommodation offered them. "You cannot pass the night here!"

"If I could not do worse than that at need," said Francesca, in a similar tone, "I ought to have stayed at home. See now! there, in that corner, I can sit comfortably enough against the wall, and the Professor shall sit next me. I shall do well enough! But I do wish that it were possible for Enrico to have the means of drying his clothes. But I suppose it is impossible!"

"I am afraid so! Where is Varani?" asked Rinaldo.

"I can't think!" replied his sister. "He ran off directly after we were shown this place. He said he should be back immediately."

"The men are scattered all over the place! I suppose roll-call will be dispensed with to-night. Many of them have found lodging in the private houses. Where is Enrico?"

Francesca pointed to a corner formed by a wooden screen, which, standing at right angles to the wall, was intended to protect the chamber from the draught of the great doorway. There, crouched close in the corner, with his head resting against the screen, Enrico was already fast asleep.

"Poor little fellow!" she said, "he is sadly tired! I would that we could do anything for him!"

As she spoke, Varani came stumbling and shuffling into the room, out of breath with hurry.

"Come! come away, all of you! There are three beds! Come along! Quick! The Professor wants somebody to take care of him, does he, cousin Francesco? Or is it he, rather, that takes care of the young folks? Come along!"

And then, while Enrico was with some difficulty roused and made to understand that he must walk yet a few more yards that night, but that there was a good bed at the end of them, the Professor explained that as soon as he had heard the name of the place where they were, he recollected that an old friend and comrade of his was *medico di condotta* * there;—that he had rushed off in search of

* Every *comunita*, or parish, as we should say (only the social

him, and was lucky enough to find him before he had promised the accommodation he had to offer to others. He had, of course, received his old friend with open arms; had sent him to bring his party at once to his house, and could promise beds for three, a warm shake-down for the other two, and a supper for all.

None of the party were disposed to deny that this prospect made a very considerable change for the better in the aspect of their affairs;—or that the Professor had stolen a march upon them this time, in the matter of showing himself the capable man of the party.

The fatigue and the wetting were soon forgotten in the kindly ministrations and hospitality of good Dr. Monaldi and his wife. The Professor absolutely and peremptorily refused to occupy either of the three beds at the disposal of the party. Half the night, he said, would not be at all more than enough for all the talk he wanted to have with his old friend, and an arm-chair before the fire would do admirably well for the other half. Enrico had been barely able to keep awake long enough to get

unit so called is a civil, and not an ecclesiastical one), in Tuscany, keeps in its pay a medical practitioner, bound to attend the poor. Those deemed "poor" for this purpose are in the country districts, and especially among the mountains, pretty nearly the whole of the inhabitants; and the *medico di condotta* is generally the only member of the profession in the place.

some supper before he was stretched on one of the two beds in the room occupied by the doctor and his wife. Francesca did not make any difficulty of accepting the room and bed of the doctor's one maid-servant. And Giulio and Rinaldo having agreed to toss up for the other bed in the principal chamber, the lot fell to Rinaldo, and he was soon fast asleep by the side of his brother.

Signora Monaldi and her maid went out to share the beds of some neighbours, and the Doctor, the Professor, and Malatesta piled up the logs on the hearth, drew the most comfortable of the chairs around it, and prepared to pass the night as best they might between chatting and sleeping.

For it must be understood that a poor *medico di condotta* in a mountain townlet was not in the least likely to have a spare bed or bedroom, much less three, in his house; and when the extent of his possibilities of accommodating the volunteers in their march was discussed, it was taken as a matter of course, in this as in thousands of other cases on similar occasions in those days, that the whole of the inmates were to abandon for the night their own sleeping accommodation in favour of the men who had become crusaders in the holy cause of Italy.

CHAPTER IV.

SIGNORINA BENEDETTA.

THE small troubles of this first evening's march in the wet were, however, but the foretaste of much more and worse of the same sort that was in store for the Tuscan volunteers.

The Professor's prophecy with regard to the weather, in the first place, turned out to be an egregious failure. It continued to rain all night, and there was at daybreak every symptom that it would continue to do so. After lingering a little, in the vain hope that the sun would appear on the scene and operate a diversion in their favour, the men formed in marching order in the *piazza* of the little town, and prepared for their day's work under a pouring rain. Those who have never tried it may be apt to think "a wetting" a small matter for a

body of young men, most of them in the prime of life. And most of those who are not unaccustomed to exposure to the weather, contemplate a wet day's work as it appears when looked at with the background of a good supper and warm quarters at the close of it. And that background is so much a matter of course, in their estimate, that they are hardly aware how the prospect would look without it. Those who have tried it, know that to arrive at nightfall very footsore, wet to the skin, to find little or no shelter, no possibility of dry clothes, and small possibilities of food, is a matter to try the courage and powers of resistance of men more than the meeting an enemy in the field. And this trial the poor volunteers were destined to undergo on that day's march over the crest of the Apennine.

There was no singing and little talking in the ranks as the column marched out of the hospitable little town and set their faces towards the chesnut and pine-covered side of the mountain. Still, the Tuscan cheerfulness and good humour did not desert them. The sun, it was declared, was sure to show himself as he rose above the mountain-tops. When that hope was gone, his appearance was definitively fixed for mid-day ! But mid-day passed, and still the rain came down on the thoroughly drenched men steadily and perseveringly. Then the cheerful

prognostications died out. There was nothing more to be said, and nothing for it but to tramp doggedly onward through the deep mud as long as strength to do so lasted. Shortly after mid-day, when many a weary mile had to be traversed before the stopping-place for the night was reached, Enrico became very much knocked up. Again the Professor took his musket, and Rinaldo insisted on carrying his knapsack in addition to his own. The poor boy strove hard to resist this, and suffered much before he would consent to it. He was at length compelled to do so, as well as to allow Malatesta to assist him by giving him his arm. Francesca stood the work better than could have been expected—as well, indeed, as any one of the party. She had wished to assist Enrico on the other side, but the proposal had so evidently wounded the poor boy's pride to the quick, that she had not repeated it. An hour or two later, however, while yet another hour's work remained to be done, he became so much worse, and so "groggy" in his walk, as the pedestrian's phrase very graphically, if somewhat inelegantly, expresses it, that his companions began to fear he would be absolutely unable to go on. Rinaldo laboured on bravely under the two knapsacks, and the Professor, though he declared he did not feel the difference, was laden quite enough with a musket in addition to his own.

Malatesta was doing his utmost to support the boy, but he was stumbling at every step. Francesca again stepped to his side, and, without saying anything, put his arm within hers. But still the poor child's pride of manhood struggled hard.

"No! Francesca!" he said; "I can go better alone! I can indeed! And—and—don't you know," he added, in a lower voice, "that I would rather lie down and die by the roadside than add to your toil and difficulty. It must be bad enough for you as it is!"

Francesca made no reply, but drawing her brother a little behind, she said, "Give me one of the muskets, and go and give him your arm. Quick! and do not say a word!"

The Professor did as he was bid; and Enrico, unconscious of the extra load which had been laid upon Francesca, did not reject his aid.

Thus, half carried, half dragged along, the boy reached the end of the day's journey; and there were others in the ranks who had been as hardly able to do so as he. But the worst was not over yet.

The crest of the Apennine had been passed, and also the frontier of the Tuscan dominion. The village—for it was little more than that—which was to be their resting-place for that night, was in the Modenese territory; and the Tuscans, for the first time, found themselves in a *foreign*

country. A little outside the village the column halted, as usual, for the report of the *forieri** to be made to the commanding officer, and for the different companies to receive their directions as to the different quarters provided for them. The rain was still falling, but the hard day's work was done, and the weary, draggled, jaded men were consoling themselves with the thoughts of food and rest. In every place through which they had as yet passed, everything had been done that kindly feeling and enthusiasm for the cause could do, to make them as comfortable as the circumstances permitted. They were that night to experience, for the first time, the result of a different disposition.

One after another the *forieri* declared that all their efforts to provide suitable quarters for the men had been vain; they had been met by evasions, studied difficulties, or flat refusals. The means of lodging the column seemed to be in reality very small. The only monastery in the place—a resource very frequently made available in Italy for such purposes—was on a high hill, at least a mile from the town. There was a small *palazzo pubblico* in which shelter for two or three

* The “forieri” in the Italian armies are the sergeants, whose duty it is to precede troops on the march—one for each company—and to make arrangements for the lodging and rations of the men.

hundred of the men might possibly be found. But, unless by force, it did not seem likely that they could get access to it. The keys were said to be in the hands of some official who was not to be found. There was an open *loggia* in the *piazza* of the little town which might serve as a shelter, but would prove in such a night, and after such a day, a most miserable resource. A small number of the people had professed themselves willing to do what they could towards sheltering some few of the volunteers in their houses, but the great majority had shown themselves altogether hostile and disinclined to be of any service. Even the rations they had with difficulty been able to purchase were scanty and very insufficient. In short, the prospect was as little cheering as was possible, and to the perfect inexperience of the officers in command of the column, sufficiently perplexing.

After a few words of consultation among them, the men were ordered to advance, and take up a position in the *piazza*, availing themselves of such shelter as the *loggia*, or other such places, might afford from the still falling rain, while the officers in command of the body ascertained what could best be done.

There was in the same *piazza* the west front of a large church, the principal one of the town; and the first measure that occurred was to put the wet and tired men into that shelter, and, if possible, to

obtain a quantity of straw for them to lie on. An officer was accordingly sent to the *curato* to request that the church might be opened for that purpose. The *curato*, however, declared that the *sacristan* had the keys, and that he himself had no means of access to the church without him. The sacristan was not at home; and his niece, the only person in his house, declared that she did not know where her uncle was to be found. In short, after nearly an hour had been lost in these vain attempts, it became clear that there was nothing for it but to force open the door at the certain cost of a shriek of rage in the reactionary papers at the sacrilege! Then more delay occurred in finding a blacksmith who was willing to undertake such an office. And when at length a Vulcan was discovered, who, under repeated protest that he acted on compulsion, did not absolutely refuse to do the required stroke of his work, much more difficulty had to be got over before any straw could be obtained to spread on the damp cold flagstones of the church.

Meantime, the *foriere* of the company to which the Professor and his party belonged, had been somewhat more successful in obtaining admission to another very much smaller church in another part of the small town. It was not a parish church, but one of those small oratories of which there are such numbers in every town in Italy; and the priest who had charge of it was, as his sister and

housekeeper declared, absent from the place. She, however, produced the key (acting under protest, as she too, declared), but in some degree, as might be believed, from pity for the poor shivering lads so grievously in need of shelter.

And it was but very wretched shelter that the little building afforded; for though it was floored with boards instead of flagstones like the large church, it was miserably damp, and exhaled an odour of rotting wood from its dark cavern-like vaults, that was anything but inviting to a traveller in search of a bed-chamber. The company, however, whose *foriere* had had the good luck to find this place of shelter, while the rest of the body were still waiting for the opening of the larger building, crowded into it eagerly, and more than conveniently filled the small space.

"At least, she was better than that other scoundrel of a priest," said the *foriere* to Malatesta, as the company were moving off from the *piazza* to take possession of the accommodation found for them.

He was alluding to the priest's sister, who had given the key of the little oratory.

"If she did it for any sake save that of sheer fear," answered Malatesta, who still had Enrico between him and the Professor; "I dare say she was frightened out of her life!"

"Well! I can't say she appeared to like the look

of me!" returned the *foriere*, laughing. "The old girl spoke to me out of the window. There was no getting her down to the door, though I used all the coaxing I could think of. At last, she threw me the key out of the window!"

"I do believe," returned Malatesta, "that they think we are cannibals. How did you find out where the priest lived?"

"Oh! he lives in a bit of a lodging built over the east end of the little church. You can't see the place from the front; but turn up that little lane alongside of the church, and you will see three or four little windows in a strip of wall stuck on to the top of it, and a little narrow door in the corner of a buttress below. Of course, I knew that was the priest's quarters. There is a bell-handle at the door, like you see at an apothecary's, for rousing out the old fellow, when he's wanted in a hurry at night. So I rang away at that, till the housekeeper put her head out of the window."

"Pooh! ah! what a hole!" cried Malatesta, as he entered the little oratory. "The outside of the door would be the better side, two to one, if the rain would only cease! But I suppose we must be glad of the shelter, and shall, perhaps, get used to the stench before morning. You will be glad of some hours' rest even here, Enrico, my poor fellow," he added, as they went in.

"Oh! I shall do very well, Giulio!" said the

boy, striving to brighten up; "I feel a great deal better than I did before we arrived, already."

"I shall make haste, and look out for the driest corner of this damp den!" said the Professor; "come along!"

Malatesta followed, leaving the boy's arm a minute, as he pressed on with the crowd into the narrow doorway of the church. But, instead of following, Enrico, who had listened to what had passed between Malatesta and the *foriere*, and into whose head an idea had flashed suddenly, stole away from the crowd who were thronging into the church, and, turning up the lane mentioned by the *foriere*, found the door and the bell, as had been described, readily enough, though it was by that time very dark.

He pulled the bell three or four times before he succeeded in bringing the same "old girl," as the *foriere* has irreverently called the Signora Benedetta Lanfredoni, the sister and housekeeper of the priest of the Oratory of St. Trofimo, once again to the window.

"Signorina!" cried a flute-like childish voice, as the white-capped head was poked out peeringly into the darkness; "Signorina!"

"*Chi è?*" answered the white cap, which was all that was visible in the darkness; "*il Priore* is not at home. You must return another day!"

"I don't want the Priore, Signorina!" replied

Enrico, in his most coaxing tone, and putting a special emphasis on the syllable indicative of the flattering diminutive, which turned *lady*, into *young lady*; "I want to speak to you, if I might."

"Want me, child! Whom do you come from? And what do you want?"

"Oh! Signorina, if you would come down and speak to me here a minute, I should be so grateful to you. I can't scream out what I have to say!" said the little treble voice, which sounded more like a girl's than a boy's tone; "do pray come down, Signorina!"

"*Santa Madonna!*" cried the Signora Benedetta, "how can I unbolt the door at this time of night? Are you all alone, child?"

"Quite alone, Signorina!"

"Is there nobody in the lane?"

"Not a soul, Signorina; the soldiers are all gone into the church," replied the boy, using cunningly the term "soldiers," which was assuredly not the word one of the volunteers would have used.

"Well, then! wait a minute; I will come down!"

And then a light glimmered under the door;—a noise of withdrawing heavy bolts was heard, and the little door was cautiously opened.

"Come in out of the rain, child, and tell me your message!" said Benedetta, carefully protect-

ing her lamp from the wind with her hand, in such a manner that its light was prevented from falling upon Enrico till he was within the door, and had, as he entered, shut it behind him. It was but for an instant that its gleam fell on him. For no sooner had it revealed the outward semblance of the volunteer, than it fell from Benedetta's hand, and was extinguished by the fall!

"*Santa Vergine!* A man! a soldier! a revolutionary! a republican! And I am alone in the house! Don't murder me, good young man! don't murder me! you'll get nothing by it! We are poor people—very poor!"

"Oh, Signorina! I would not do you any harm for the world! I am so sorry to have frightened you! Shall I light the lamp, Signorina? I have got some matches in my pocket."

It was impossible for even the Signora Benedetta not to be in some degree reassured by the gentle, childish tones, and the submissive accent of the voice in the dark.

"Yes!" she answered, after a moment's silence, "it would be better to light the lamp if you can find it. I should be obliged to you if you would do so,—and then you must go away—for indeed, young man, I have nothing to give you."

Enrico soon found the lamp, lighted it, and advanced to restore it to the lady, who had retreated

to the foot of the stairs at the other end of the passage.

As he put it into her hand, bowing as he did so, and looking up wistfully into her face, she ventured to look at him for the first time; and there was something in what she saw that appealed irresistibly to her woman's heart. The pretty boyish face was pale and haggard, the poor slender little figure mud-bedragged, and drenched to the skin.

"Thank you, young man!" said Benedetta, as she took the light from his hand; "you look very pale and tired. Bless me! it's quite a child! *Santa Madonna!* how can they send such children to be soldiers! But what do you want of me, young man? I am all alone in the house;—the Priore away!—you should not have come here, you know!"

"I did not mean to come in, Signorina!" replied Enrico very submissively, "only you told me to do so, and I was afraid the wind would blow the lamp out. But I only wanted to ask you a great favour,—a charity in the name of God!"

"But what can I do for you? I have nothing to give you! Poor boy! how pale you look! And you are wet to the skin! *Dio mio!* what can be done for you?"

"Ah! Signorina, I see you have a kind heart! You are compassionate. You could do a kind-

ness that the Madonna herself would bless you for!"

"But I am all alone! I dare not! What would my brother say? It is but a child, to be sure!" said Signora Benedetta to herself, relenting, and doubting not that the kindness needed was to receive the suppliant before her, and give him a night's lodging. "Nobody could say I let a man into the house! 'tis a child!—nothing but a child, poor little fellow! What is your name, my dear?" said Signora Benedetta, carrying out her kindly-meant theory in her mode of address.

Enrico would have resented such a wrong done to his manhood sharply enough under any other circumstances, but he could not afford to do so at present.

"My name, Signorina, is Enrico Palmieri; I am from Florence. But, *mia cara* Signorina, that is not what I wanted to ask of you. I am very tired, but I shall do very well with the others on the clean straw in the church below there. I wanted, *mia buona* Signorina," sinking his voice to a coaxing whisper, "to ask your charitable kindness and compassion for another, a comrade, who is far more in need of it than I am."

But Signora Benedetta, who had already begun to take a kindly interest in the pretty boy before her, and who had really been representing to her-

self that the boyhood of the applicant might be made to excuse the outrageous *inconvenance* of the admission of a man! a soldier!! a volunteer!!! into the house in the absence of her brother, was by no means disposed to regard this transfer of her sympathies favourably.

“*Come! vi pare!*”* she cried. “You are mad, my child. I, the sister and *governante* of Don Antonio Lanfredoni, admit a man to sleep in the house, and my brother absent! *Che!* What would all the town say? Go back, my child, to those who sent you, and tell them to knock at some other door. I would not do such a thing to save the whole lot of them from sleeping in the *piazza* all night—no, not if I was one of them, Heaven forbid! myself!”

“Oh! Signorina! how could you think that I should ask such a thing, or suppose it possible! I know better what is proper, and what is due to you, Signorina! But listen! it is a great secret. But I know you can be trusted with it. I would not tell it to any one else for the world! Listen, Signorina!” And the little rogue affected to whisper, though there was no ear near them. “It is a poor girl whom I want you to give shelter to! Think of a poor girl, Signorina—a good, modest girl—in the midst of the men down there!”

* “What! do you think it possible!”

"*Misericordia!*" exclaimed the Signora Benedetta, throwing up her hands, with that prolonged accentuation of the first syllable, which the Italians adopt when the word is used as an exclamation. "Worse and worse! how can I take a girl in man's clothes? What business had she there, I should like to know? Some lover, I'll be bound!"

"*Che! che—e—e!* Listen, Signorina; you are so good, I must trust you altogether. She is with her brother, a Professor of Pisa; and her only reason for coming is to be with him!"

"*Santa Madonna! che cosa! che cosa!** *che cosa, Dio mio!* And pray, young man,"—for Enrico had suddenly resumed his manly stature, in worthy Signora Benedetta's imagination,—“and pray, what induces you to think of this young lady before thinking of yourself?”

"I lodge in the Professor's house, Signorina; and Donna Francesca has been like a mother to me," said the wily fellow; "I love her almost as well as my own dear mother, at Florence. Oh! Signorina," he continued, suddenly catching that hand of the lady which was not engaged in holding the lamp, "do! do! give your kind heart this luxury! There can be no harm in taking in a poor girl, and saving her from passing such a night.

* "What a business!"

I ask it in the name of the Madonna, who will bless you for it!"

"And you yourself, my poor child?" asked Benedetta, going back to her former theory of Enrico's extreme juvenility.

"Oh! never fear for me, *mia buona* Signorina! I shall do very well! I will go and bring Francesca!"

"Stop! stop! I don't know. And if all the town takes her for a man?"

"But, in the first place, nobody will see anything. She will leave you in the morning before daylight. And, besides, after we are gone, it will not signify," added the boy, rapidly reflecting that he had not mentioned the Professor's name, and that, in fact, it could not do any mischief; "you can say then that you rescued a poor girl from passing a night with all the regiment;—and you were the only person in the town trusted with the secret. Such an action will do you honour. Your brother will certainly approve it. Oh! Signorina, you are an angel! I shall never forget to pray for you! Now I will go and bring her to you. You will not repent your goodness!"

And Signora Benedetta, partly moved by curiosity, partly by the vehemence of Enrico's entreaties, and partly, perhaps, by the prospect of the bit of gossip to be got out of the matter when the

volunteers should have taken their departure, which Enrico had so skilfully shown her a glimpse of, allowed him to go.

Making his way through the crowd about the door into the little musty oratory, where the men, in miserable plight enough, were in the confusion of getting their scanty rations, Enrico found his friends, wondering much what could have become of him.

"I have found a lodging for Francesco," he whispered; "you must come with me, directly, Francesco! None of the others must come! For it is a lone woman, and you would frighten her out of her wits! It was very difficult to persuade her! But I succeeded. Come, Francesco, quick! It is close at hand."

"Caro Enrico!" exclaimed Francesca, taking his hand; "to think of your busying yourself about me, knocked up as you are yourself. And I talked of taking care of you! But you have found a bed for yourself, too, I hope!"

"Me! oh, I had far rather be with the others here! I am much better now; all right, indeed. I shall do well enough!"

"And you think I am going to take a bed of your finding, while you stay in your wet clothes in this hole!"

"Well! I'll tell you what it is, Francesco! If you

don't come and accept the quarters I have found for you, I solemnly swear by all the saints that I will go and sleep under the *loggia* in the *piazza*!"

"*Bravo! Enrico! bravo, fratello mio!*" cried Rinaldo. "And I'll go with you and share your quarters!"

"As for that matter, Signor Rinaldo, you can please yourself," said Francesca, with some little pique in her manner; "nobody will prevent you from disposing of yourself as you choose, I am sure. The bed that Enrico wants me to take, was not of your finding!"

"Fortunately no!" said Rinaldo, bitterly. "If it had been, there would have been no chance of your accepting it. As it is, I trust you will."

"I swear, if sh——he does not, I will stick to what I said!" cried Enrico.

"Shall I go, Pietro?" said Francesca.

"Of course we shall all be the better for knowing that you are in comfortable quarters," answered the Professor, simply.

"Unquestionably!" said Malatesta.

"Then you and the Professor and Enrico are all of opinion that I had better go!" said Francesca, with a glance at Rinaldo.

"And I can have nothing to say in the matter, seeing that the quarters offered you were not of my finding!" said Rinaldo.

"I shall not go unless you are all agreed about it!" said Francesca, with a pout, and a capricious inconsistency, that would have gone far towards betraying the secret of her sex to any one who had overheard the above conversation.

"Surely I have said enough!" answered poor Rinaldo, who, however, if he had not been as blind as youths in his position always are, ought to have drawn a very comforting augury from Francesca's manner towards him. "Yow know well," he whispered, stepping up to her side, "how miserable all the discomforts you have to endure make me. I implore you to go at once with Enrico to the place he has been fortunate enough to find for you. I cannot help envying him the chance," he added in a yet lower whisper, "though I know it would have made no difference, unless, perhaps, to induce you to refuse it."

"Well! I suppose I must go!" said Francesca. "But about Enrico——"

"Be sure," said the Professor, "that we will take very good care that he shall have the best place we can make for him here."

"Well! if it must be so, good night all! Come along, Enrico. You ought to be quartermaster-general."

And then, as they stood together at the little narrow door of the priest's dwelling, Enrico had to

confess the means he had been obliged to use to obtain the boon required, assuring his companion, not very truthfully, that it would have been out of the question to induce the priest's sister to receive him "or any other of the men."

Though at first somewhat startled by the betrayal of her secret, it was impossible for Francesca to be angry with the boy; and a moment's reflection showed her that in truth no harm of any kind could arise from its being known to-morrow in the little remote town that there was a woman in the ranks of the *Corpo Universitario*. So she mixed but a little scolding with her thanks and injunctions to him to take the best care he could of himself.

Within half an hour of her arrival Francesca and Benedetta were great friends, and the good *governante* did everything she could to make her guest comfortable. Her wet clothes, which were a subject of infinite curiosity and much examination to Signora Benedetta, were dried and cleaned. And the next morning, the handsome private in Corporal Malatesta's squadron was the only one in the column who came to morning roll-call dry, clean, and restored by a comfortable night's rest.

That miserable day's march which has been described, and which brought the little column across the crest of the Apennine, was the worst of the route. The remaining days were fine, and the

men had nothing worse to contend against than blistered feet and fatigue.

Nevertheless, that terrible day had done considerable mischief. Many were subsequently obliged to go into the hospital in consequence of it. It was evident to all the little party of friends, on starting the following morning, that Enrico, among others, had caught a bad cold. He declared that there was nothing the matter with him, and though manifestly suffering, marched on bravely all the early part of the day. Francesca watched him with anxious eyes as they proceeded on their way. She was very sure that he was ill. He would not admit it, however, and struggled on through that day. The next, he started in the morning, still striving hard not to break down. But he had a good deal of fever, and had not been able to sleep during the night. The column had marched scarcely two miles, before he was compelled to fall out, and sit down shivering, with his hands and feet burning, on a bank by the roadside. They put him in an ambulance cart, and so the next day reached Reggio, where he was obliged to go into hospital.

Fortunately the volunteers remained there for some time, and the discipline was not so strict as that his friends, specially the Professor and Francesca, found any difficulty in obtaining permission to visit him frequently. For a few hours at one

time he was a little light-headed; and it was touching to hear his despair at being, as he fancied, left behind, while his comrades had marched on to do the work, in which he had so burned to take his part. Francesca, who was by his bedside at the time, strove to assure him that such was not the case, that they were all still in Reggio, that the corps was not expected to move yet, and that he would be well in time to march with them.

“Where is Rinaldo?” he asked; “if I can be with him, I know I shall be in time! They won’t fight without him! Are you sure Rinaldo is not gone?”

And Francesca was obliged to go in search of his brother, and return with him to the bedside. During that night, which was the critical turning point of his malady, she obtained permission to sit beside him; and in the morning she was able to tell his brother and the others that he was pronounced out of danger, and in a fair way to recover quickly. Still, to assure and expedite this, a degree of watchful care and attendance were necessary, which it is very difficult to command in a temporarily established and far from well-provided military hospital. And the medical man in charge of it, who declared that he had never seen a more decided vocation for the duty of a sick-nurse than that evinced by the volunteer Francesco Varani,

made no difficulty in backing a request, that as long as the *Corpo Universitario* remained in Reggio, he might be permitted to remain in attendance on the boy Palmieri. The probability is, that the now eminent surgeon in question, whose eye is not likely to be deceived in such matters, made a very shrewd guess at the time as to the real sex of the nurse he was securing for his patient.

Often, too, during his convalescence, Rinaldo would find opportunities of spending an hour by his brother's bedside. There was a great and close affection between the two fatherless brothers, and Rinaldo, who had suffered much while Enrico's life was in danger, was now almost as anxious as the boy himself that he should be well enough to march with the rest when they should leave Reggio. Nevertheless, it may be doubted whether this anxiety was the sole feeling that prompted him to lose no opportunity of returning as frequently as possible to Enrico's bedside. Possibly he might have contented himself with knowing that his brother was going on well, had he been attended by any other nurse. The hours he thus passed with Francesca, often while their patient slept, were by far the sweetest he had ever known in her society. She seemed gentler, softer, he would have almost said more womanly, by his brother's sick-bed than he had ever known her.

Her manner to him seemed more easy, simple, and natural than of yore. The scratchy, petulant, head-tossing, variable manner which had so often tormented him, and gave him so many a sleepless night in days gone by, was all changed. And he speculated much, and very fruitlessly, on the phenomenon. Was it all due to her tenderness for Enrico? He had at times been sorely tempted to feel jealousy of his brother. Was Francesca fond of Enrico more and otherwise than she avowed herself to be? Judging from her manner towards the boy, and from his knowledge of her character, he once more dismissed this idea, as he had done a hundred times before. Could he dare to hope that the manifest change in her was in any degree caused by a modification of her feelings towards himself? He had always been persuaded at Pisa that he was displeasing and repugnant to her. Could any hope be extracted from her altered manner that the devotion and intensity of his passion had at length touched her heart?

Could Rinaldo have read a woman's heart, as no man ever can, when he has an especial interest in the perusal of that cypher-written volume, and as most men learn to do by the time the study is no longer of supreme importance to them, he would not have fallen into the former error; and he would have discovered the cause of that change

of manner which he could not miss seeing in Francesca, in the sure and salutary operation on her mind of a life passed amid the realities of a noble and arduous enterprise, amid toil, illness, suffering, privation, and difficulty.

One day, when Rinaldo went to pass the hour at his brother's bedside, to which, for some time past, he had learned to look forward as the great pleasure of his day, he found Enrico up and dressed. The doctor had permitted him to get up for a few hours, on the express condition that he should remain perfectly quiet. But he had begged so hard that his musket might be shown to him—only shown to him, if he was not allowed to touch it—that Francesca had consented to fetch it for him. And when Rinaldo came he found him, in despite of Francesca's remonstrances, with it on his shoulder, and showing, by a somewhat tottering march across the room, how perfectly fit he was to resume his duties in the ranks.

"You will be, Enrico *mio*, quite in time to march with us across the Po," said Francesca, taking it from him, "if you are only not too much in a hurry. One more week of care and quiet here, and you will be able to carry your knapsack and shoulder your musket!"

"And I see no signs of our getting the order to march sooner than that," said Rinaldo.

"Thank God!" said the boy, fervently. "Think what would have become of me, if I had been obliged to remain here after you had all gone;—to lie here on my back while you were driving the Austrians across the Alps! Ah! I should never have got well any more then. I should have died, if it was from sheer rage!"

"Ah! it would have been bitter enough!" returned his brother; "bitter enough for all of us to leave you. I don't think you will forget in a hurry to whose care you owe it that it will not be so!"

"I believe you! I hope never to forget it!—never—never," added the boy, grasping Francesca's hand as he spoke. "With such a comrade one may go happily to the end of any campaign, let it be as long as it may!"

"Or any life!" said Rinaldo, in a tone so low that it seemed doubtful whether it was intended to be heard or not, and not venturing to look at Francesca as he spoke.

Francesca shot one quick furtive glance under her eyelashes at him; and if any sharper eye than Rinaldo's had been there on the watch, a sudden flush, almost as momentary as the glance, might have been seen to pass over her cheeks and brow. But she replied only to the words of Enrico.

"You admit, then, at last, *Signorino mio*, that there was some show of reason in all that I said at Pisa, when I had to beg so hard to be permitted to accompany your lordships," said she, with a sunny smile, which it is just possible might have been caused by the words of the elder rather than by those of the younger brother.

"Ah! what an advantage I have put into your hands by falling ill!" said Enrico, laughing. "But, dear Francesca—I may say Francesca, just once and a way, when there are no ears near to hear me; and somehow or other it is much more pleasant to say *ca* than *co* when one has to express to anybody what I want to express to you, if I could;—dear Francesca, how can I ever testify my sense of all I owe you!"

"Of what we both owe you—Francesca," said Rinaldo, adding the last word hesitatingly, as if he felt that the termination of it took away the permissibility of addressing her by her simple christian name, as he, like the rest, had done, in the masculine gender, during their expedition.

"Only this!" said Francesca, colouring up; "when it is over, and we are back again in Tuscany, let Signora Palmieri know that I did my duty by her son, as I had promised to do. It would be a pleasure to me that she should know that."

"Yes! I can understand that it may be sweet to

receive the thanks of a mother," said Rinaldo;—"be very sure that they will be yours in no stinted measure, Francesca!"

Enrico from that day recovered as rapidly as Francesca had promised him. Once on the road towards recovery from illness, youth travels quickly. And he had rejoined his companions several days before the order for marching was received.

It was not till the 23rd of April that the Tuscan volunteers crossed the Po. It was a day of immense exultation among them. The exact time and place when and where their services would be required was not yet known; but it was evident that there would be active work, probably on the Mincio, ere long, and the lads were thirsting with a burning thirst to find themselves confronted with the hated white-coated troops of the oppressor.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOUR BEFORE THE BATTLE.

THE little volunteer corps had been impatiently waiting for the day when they were to be allowed to cross the Po, and, as they fancied, proceed at once to the work of driving the Austrians before them across the Alps. They crossed the Po, as has been said, on the 23rd of April; but some time longer elapsed before events developed themselves sufficiently for it to become clear what precisely was the service which Italy would expect from the boys of Tuscany. It was not to be supposed that the brave, well-disciplined, and well-appointed army of Piedmont would rely much on aid from, or entrust to Tuscan troops, much less to Tuscan volunteers, any important share in the work of liberating their common country. For it was not only beyond the Alps that Tuscany had acquired

the reputation of having sunk more deeply than any other province of Italy into the slough of unwarlike imbecility. And what these poor University lads, to whom the smell of powder and almost the gleam of steel was unknown, chiefly feared was, that no opportunity would be afforded them of showing that the trumpet-call which sounded the hour of Italian resuscitation had waked from its sleep of three centuries the old spirit that once cradled European freedom on the banks of the Arno.

They were not doomed, however, to any such disgrace or disappointment. The fortune of war had something better in store for them. Though the map of Europe is thickly studded with the sinister crossed-swords mark, which indicates the site of a blood-fattened battle-ground, there are few events of the veritable Thermopylæ brand among those commemorated. And one of the few is the property—*κτῆμα ἐς αἰε*—of the boys of lotos-eating Tuscany.

There are two of these cross-sword marks set fast in the map since that May of 1848, about two miles apart from each other, and both of them about three from Mantua. The more northern of the two is at a spot called Curtatone, the other at one named Montanara—mute, inglorious hamlets, whose names—high-sounding and romantic now

and henceforth—had, during their hybernation of the previous centuries, never been heard, save by the peasants of the district.

The volunteers had occupied these two points since the 10th of May, and the Austrians were in the swamp-guarded citadel of Mantua, only three miles off. And every day brought forth its rumours of movements and demonstrations, and of the gathering of the clouds which precede the thunderstorm. Still the time went on, and the volunteers waited with such patience as they might till the day of their trial should come.

About half the little body were at Curtatone and half at Montanara. The former of these places is on the bank of the large basin of water formed by the Mincio in that part of its course. It is called the Lago Superiore, and it extends, under that name, and under the names of the Lago di Mezzo and the Lago Inferiore, to and around three sides of the city of Mantua. This large body of water thus almost surrounding the town is the main element of its great strength as a military position; although it is further fortified by very extensive ramparts and earth-works to the south, and by an exceedingly strong citadel on the other side of the lake to the north. A line from Curtatone drawn southwards for a distance of two miles would touch Montanara.

About twelve miles to the north-west, following the course of the Mincio, is the little town of Goito, in the neighbourhood of which was the extreme right of the Piedmontese army, the extreme left extending to within eight miles of Verona. The long line thus occupied by the Piedmontese troops, from the neighbourhood of Goito on the Mincio, to that of Verona far away to the north-east, completely intercepts the road from Mantua to Peschiera, a strong fortress at the foot of the Lago di Garda, in which an Austrian garrison was at that time besieged by the Piedmontese troops.

The position, then, and the state of the case, was thus :

The Austrians were at Verona, eight miles to the eastward of the extreme left of the Piedmontese army. From Verona southward to Mantua, which they also held, the road was open to them. The Piedmontese line stretched between Verona and Peschiera, and came down in a south-western direction between Peschiera and Mantua till its extreme left lay on the Mincio, near Goito. Across the way from Mantua to Goito, at a distance of three miles from the former, lay the little Tuscan force. Two roads lead from Mantua in the direction of Goito. One passes close along the lake, through Curtatone, and the other two miles to the southward, through Montanara.

From this statement it will be understood, that if

it entered into Radetzky's head to draw a strong force from Verona to Mantua, and then attempt to take the Piedmontese army in flank at Goito, and, after defeating it there, before it could have time to concentrate itself, push on to relieve Peschiera,—in that case he would have to pass from Mantua to Goito exactly over the ground occupied by the Tuscans. It will also be understood, further, that, inasmuch as the success of such an operation would depend on the suddenness with which it was executed, it would be very important that no time should be lost in kicking out of the way as speedily as possible whatever obstacle they might be rash enough to oppose to the Austrian general's progress. For every hour lost in the march from Mantua to Goito, was so much time allowed the Piedmontese to concentrate their forces, and prepare to give battle at the latter place.

Now, on the 28th of May, and in the night between that and the 29th, it became clear that this plan was exactly what *had* entered into General Radetzky's head. And the small matter which Italy asked of the little corps of Tuscan University volunteers, just as a trial stroke to show their mettle, was simply to stand in the way and stop it against the Austrian field-marshal and his veteran regiments, until the Piedmontese army should have time to prepare itself to receive him.

The volunteers, on their arrival at the above-described positions in the neighbourhood of Mantua, were under the orders of the Tuscan general, De Laugier, who was himself subordinate to the Piedmontese general, Bava, in command of the Piedmontese troops in the vicinity of Goito.

In the course of the 28th of May, a Piedmontese lancer brought a letter to De Laugier from General Bava, telling him that reports had been received to the effect that an Austrian force, from six to eight thousand strong, had left Verona the preceding night directed towards Mantua. General Bava thought that the amount of this force was probably greatly exaggerated; that it was most likely merely sent to replace other troops withdrawn from Mantua on account of the dissensions which were said to exist among the different corps composing that garrison; but that he had thought it prudent to give General De Laugier notice that, in case an attack on the positions held by him was intended, he might be prepared for it.*

At one o'clock in the morning of the 29th came a second despatch from Bava. The account that a strong body of troops had marched to Mantua

* Letter from Bava to Laugier, printed in a "Racconto Storico della Giornata Campale pugnata il di 29 Maggio, 1848, a Montanara e Curtatone." Firenze, 1854. The historical details in the text are taken mainly from the above perfectly authentic account.

had been confirmed. The Tuscan general is exhorted to hold his position to the uttermost; and General Bava repeats a promise, given also in the former letter, that, in case of need, and on receiving application from De Laugier, he will hasten to his support with efficient succour.

A little later in the night, a lieutenant of Tuscan cavalry, Giuseppe Pulcinelli, who had offered General Bava to proceed as a spy to Mantua, for the purpose of ascertaining what forces had in reality reached that city from Verona, came to General De Laugier, telling him that he had seen under the walls of Mantua an army of rather more than less than thirty thousand men, comprising a large force of artillery and cavalry!

A little later arrived an adjutant, sent from the neighbourhood of Verona over-night to De Laugier, with the information that the entire Austrian army had marched out from Verona, and was about to attack the Tuscan position. This messenger, when asked why he had delayed so long in bringing his tidings, replied that he had been obliged to make a very large circuit to avoid the enemy.

The whole state of the case was now abundantly clear.

The Austrian army under Radetzky, numbering between thirty and forty thousand men, and abundantly supplied with artillery, was marching from

Mantua to attack the extreme right of the Piedmontese. In their way was a force of four thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven Tuscans, half raw soldiers, and half civilian volunteers. The Austrian field-marshal had only to walk over these, or kick them aside, to secure his object of fighting and conquering the Piedmontese at Goito, before they could have time to concentrate their troops, and then raising the siege of Peschiera.

And the Tuscan raw soldiers and University boys *were*, of course, walked over and kicked out of the way. But, to Radetzky's infinite astonishment—and, to do that grim old soldier justice, to his infinite admiration also, afterwards not grudgingly expressed—this walking over and kicking aside took the Austrian army six hours to do! The consequence was, that the Piedmontese army had the time needed for preparing to receive the enemy; that being thus prepared, it fought and won the battle of Goito on the following day; and that the besieged Austrian garrison in Peschiera, seeing that the hope of relief had passed away, surrendered on the same day!

Such is, in brief, the story of the nature of the forces engaged, of the locality, of the object in view, and of the result of the battles of Curtatone and Montanara, as history will have to record it, and as it was desirable that the reader should know

it, for the better understanding of the part taken in the work of the day by those in whom we are here more specially interested.

Malatesta's "squadron," as it has been explained that the sections are called into which the companies of an Italian regiment are divided, made part of the one thousand one hundred and six volunteers to whom, together with a body of one thousand three hundred and sixteen regular Tuscan troops, the defence of Curtatone was entrusted. Parallel to the road from Montanara to Curtatone runs a small stream called the Osone, which falls into the lake just behind the hamlet of Curtatone. Just at this point there is a mill, with an adjacent dwelling, which played an important part in the defence of the Tuscan position. In this building the Professor and his friends, with a few others, had been quartered during the days of expectation which preceded the fated 29th of May. And early on the morning of that day the whole state of the case, and the nature of the duty required of the Tuscan force, was perfectly well known to, and understood by, every individual of the *Corpo Universitario*. For this is one of the points in which such a body as the volunteers from the University differ from a corps of regular soldiers. Belonging to a different social class, and possessing a greater degree of intelligence, such men cannot be kept in ignorance of much which

an ordinary soldier in no wise troubles his head about. Of course there are many circumstances in which such knowledge may tend to intensify the evils arising from that want of military discipline inseparable from volunteer troops, and which the Tuscan general lamented in the case of those under his command at Curtatone and Montanara. But there are other cases in which such understanding of the business in hand may go far towards remedying the want of habits of discipline. It may be very true that a great army should be a machine, and an acting, not a thinking one. Yet, I take it, that each man of the three hundred at Thermopylæ knew what he wanted; and that if the individuals of the little Tuscan force at Montanara and Curtatone had not been equally aware of the object in view, they would not have held the Austrian army in check for six hours.

And it cannot be denied that the knowledge of what was expected from them, and of the desperate nature of the task, greatly enhance our estimate of the heroism which was displayed by the volunteers. In the "House of the Mill," as it is called in the accounts of the battle, there was no illusion among the little party assembled there as to the nature of the work before them. There had been illusions enough while the reality was yet distant both in time and space, when the young patriots marched

gaily out of Pisa, and the work of driving "the barbarian" out of Italy pictured itself to their young imaginations very vaguely defined amid the haze of glory around it. But the haze had vanished; and the matter was understood rightly enough by that time.

A message from Montanara, saying that the head of the enemy's column had been descried, warned the men at Curtatone to prepare for action; and those who had been quartered at the House of the Mill were about to hurry out, when the Professor, as if moved by a sudden impulse, cried,

"Stop, boys! one minute! I want to say a few words to you!"

Some twenty gathered round him; and there was not a smile on any one of their faces, though the Professor, in the character of a military orator, might at any other time have provoked one. With his knapsack all awry, his cap pushed away to the back of his head, so as to show all his great square knotty forehead, and brandishing his musket as if it were intended and carried for purely oratorical purposes, he said:

"Just a minute! Perhaps there is no man here who has so much cause for misgiving this day as I have. I mean as regards most of you who now hear me. I am the cause of most—perhaps of all of you being here. Not that your zeal

for the cause of Italy, my friends, was less than mine, but there are many at home whose zeal is not less than ours! It seems to me, therefore, that you have all of you but one life to give for Italy this day, while I shall give a dozen or more! And there are some among them very much more precious to me, and many more that are far more precious to our country, than mine. But they must all be given! They must all be given if they were a hundred times as many, without stint! Have I done wrong in bringing you here to give away your lives? Does any one of you wish you were this day in Pisa rather than here?"

Here he was answered, first by an indignant "*Che! vi pare!*" from Enrico; and then by a chorus of denegations from the rest of the group around him.

"After all, we are not soldiers! we are citizens! We owe ourselves to our country; but we owe nothing to military honour or military duty! If there is one among you who thinks that he can serve Italy better by saving his life than by now losing it, he is still free to do so; nor will any reproach rest on him!" continued the Professor, in the excess of his unmilitary simplicity, and in the singleness of his desire that the sacrifice of lives should be made deliberately, knowingly, with a due appreciation of the object to be attained and the

price to be paid for it, in the only manner, as he would have said, in which the laying down of a life entitled the giver of it to the gratitude and remembrance of his country.

“Do you all feel in your inmost hearts,” he asked, speaking with the solemnity of a preacher rather than with the enthusiasm of a soldier, “that it is your wish, your ambition, to die this day for the sake of liberating Italy from the stranger, and preparing for her a future that shall not be as the past? Let every one of you answer the truth!”

This time Malatesta was the first to reply. “That is my wish, and my determination, as God sees my heart!” said he, emphatically. And every one of the others, infected with the solemnity of the Professor’s manner, repeated the same words.

“Now,” said the Professor, in a lighter tone, “we all understand each other! Come along! Let us remember that Italy is looking on us, and let us see who can knock over most white coats before he gets knocked over himself!”

“One moment!” exclaimed Malatesta; “I, too, would wish to say a very few words. My friends, our dear Professor has told us what we have to do, and what for. We have to die for Italy. But we shall do well to understand exactly how our country will profit by our devotion. It would be absurd to suppose for a moment that we can hurl back this

Austrian army, we, some four thousand to their forty, with skilful generals and plenty of artillery ! But if we can make such a resistance as shall force them to occupy some time in crushing us, we shall have gained much, perhaps all that is needed. A few hours will be everything to the army which will fight this Austrian horde as soon as it shall have passed over us. The inevitable defeat which awaits us will be to all intents and purposes as good as a victory, if we can make it cost the Austrian a few hours of precious time. But even if we fail in this, do not think, my friends and comrades, that our lives will be thrown away. And this is what I wanted to say to you. The Professor has told us that all Italy has its eyes on us. Ay ! and he might have said, the greatest part of Europe also ! But in what mood do they look at us ? Some few with pity and compassion ; more with scoffing and derision, all with contempt ! Yes, friends, these are the sentiments with which Europe looks upon Tuscans ! What ! a few hundred boys set about to stop an Austrian army !—and those boys Tuscans ! Tuscans of all people in the world ! The absurdity would be pitiable, if there were any chance of their getting into danger. But, fortunately, Tuscans don't fight ! If they did, they would not be the slaves they are ! This is what Europe says, my friends !”

“No! No!” he continued, raising his out-turned hand in the attitude of imposing silence on the outburst of angry exclamations that broke from the little knot of his hearers. “Not so! Europe is right! The nations have a right to regard Tuscans as weakest of the weak, most helpless of the helpless,—cowardly, spiritless, nerveless! That is what slavery means! And have we not been slaves? It is because it has been so that we are here to-day. Because it has been so, and in order that it shall be so no more! And that, my friends, we shall gain by this day’s deeds, if nothing else! The blood spilt to-day shall be as the baptism of a new life for our Tuscany and Tuscans. Whatever measure of success we may obtain in the more immediate objects aimed at, this we shall in any case obtain, that never more will Italy and Europe sneer at Tuscan want of manhood! Tuscans themselves will be aroused to a new sense of self-respect by your conduct here to-day. Our friend the Professor has done well to point out clearly the nature of the task before us. We go, many of us, most of us probably, to leave our lives! But be very sure that, let the day end as it may, it will be one of those that will do its part towards the regeneration of Italy! Is there any one here who could spend his life to a better purpose? So now come on, and let each man do his best!”

Giulio went out as he spoke, to take his place at the parapet earthwork, which had been thrown up just outside the hamlet, with Enrico by his side. The boy had crept up to him while he had been speaking, as if to express his adherence to what he was saying, and side by side they took their stand at the earthwork. The others followed, causing a momentary impediment at the doorway by their eagerness to rush to the scene of their duty. And it was during that moment of pause that Rinaldo whispered to Francesca—"Stay back one instant after the rest. I have a word to say—and it must be said now or never!"

Francesca seemed to hesitate whether she should grant the request or not. The loss of the moment which Rinaldo had occupied in making it, had caused them both to be the last of the little crowd which was hurrying out of the door.

"I never asked as much before, Francesca! But now——! You will not condemn me to die without having opened my heart to you!"

Francesca at this appeal hung back, while the others pushed through the open door, leaving them alone together in the building.

"Thanks! Francesca; it is kind of you! You heard the words of your brother and of Malatesta?"

"Yes, Rinaldo! I listened to them both!"

“ You know, then, what the next hours have in store for us ! You understand that what is spoken between us two here and now, is spoken as between those about to part to meet no more ! ”

“ Not quite that ! I think that I do not under-rate the danger ; though in truth I am wholly ignorant. But surely all will not perish. There will be a remnant, and we may be among the survivors.”

“ I cannot trust to that chance, Francesca. Those are not the most likely to be among the survivors who have no wish to be so ! I would fain not carry my secret with me to the grave. May I speak it, Francesca ? ”

“ If there is anything I ought to hear——”

“ Francesca ! If there is anything ? Do you not know what it is I would tell you ? Have you not long known it ? ”

They had been standing hitherto near the door of the empty room—it was the kitchen of the mill-house—from which they were about to pass to the battle-field ; but Francesca at this point of the conversation sat down on a broad chest-seat or locker, which stood against the wall at right angles with the door, and which was the only piece of furniture remaining in the room. She had become suddenly very pale ; and the brown holland plaits in the front of her blouse were rising and falling in a

manner generally unknown to masculine garments. Her eyes were cast down, and her fingers began to busy themselves nervously with the lock of her musket, as those of girls more normally situated will in similar circumstances occupy themselves in picking a flower to pieces. Her lips moved a little; but no audible sound came from them.

“Francesca!” exclaimed he, stepping rapidly up to the spot where she had seated herself; “you *must* know that I love you—that I have long loved you—that I have watched with patience from day to day for some sign that should embolden me to tell you that my love for you has swallowed up all else in my life. But no sign came! And I have never dared to make the offer of a love that I knew was not acceptable to you. But now!—now that I have nothing to ask save your kind thoughts for yet a few minutes, I could not go to death without telling you that my life has become burdensome to me, from the time that I perceived that I could not win your love!”

Francesca was now visibly trembling so much that she could scarcely hold the musket in her hands. She put it out of them on one side of her, leaning it against the locker on which she was sitting. Rinaldo profited by the change in her position to seize the hand she had left idle.

“Francesca!” he cried, in a voice trembling with emotion, and in a tone of urgent entreaty.

The hand he held in his was as cold as marble; and he could feel her trembling, as she answered scarcely above her breath, and speaking as though the word were wrung from her against her will, like the utterance of one under the spell of magnetism :

“ Rinaldo ! ”

“ Can you say no word of comfort—of farewell to me, in this last hour, Francesca ? ”

“ This is not the time, Rinaldo, to speak of such things ! Our thoughts must be given to other matters.”

“ *Dio Grande !* not the time ! But I should not have dared to speak thus to you now, were it not the last time that we shall ever speak together.”

“ Perhaps not so ! ”

“ Can you tell me at least, Francesca, that if you should survive this day, you will think kindly of my memory ;—that when you remember, hereafter, that I told you with almost my last breath that since I first knew you, Francesca, you have been the loadstar of my life, that the thought of you was no hour absent from my heart, and that the life I give to Italy had become worthless to myself, because I failed to win your love !—can you at least say, Francesca, that when you remember this last confession, you will do so with

kindly feeling towards one who, if he was unworthy of you, yet loved you well?"

"I shall never cease to think as kindly of you, Rinaldo, as you—as you have well deserved of me," answered Francesca, in the same low tone, and speaking, as before, apparently with effort. It seemed as if she had been about to say something else, and that the latter clause of her words were substituted on second thoughts for some other expression of her feeling.

"Thanks, Francesca!" he said; "it is all that I can ask of you, and I shall die contented. But I have another matter to say to you, on which I can speak more boldly. It is to implore you not to throw away your life in the desperate struggle that awaits us."

"And I, too, can answer you on that point more boldly, Rinaldo!" said Francesca, speaking in quite a different tone, and no longer with any appearance of constraint or reserve. "I joined the volunteers to share their labour and their lot. I will not put my hand to the plough and look back."

"You heard what your brother said to all of us. I cannot feel with him that any one of us could turn back from this field without dishonour; and I know full well that no earthly consideration would induce him to do so. But for you it is very different. The objects for which you proposed to join us have already been fulfilled—and to what good purpose

we all know ; I best of any ! Your services will yet be needed in their proper sphere. There will be wounded to tend and care for. Do not throw away your life uselessly. I implore you, dear, dearest Francesca, do not come out to this deadly struggle. Go back hence, across the river, and by the other bank of it to Montanara, and put yourself under the care of the surgeon-in-chief, telling him the truth, and putting your services at his disposition. There you may be really of use. But do not unman me—us—all our friends, by the thought that we may see you from moment to moment—Oh, God!—I implore you, Francesca, not to expose yourself—us, rather—to this.”

“It cannot be, Rinaldo ! I should never hold up my head again ! No ! Where you—where Pietro sets his life on this cast, there will I set mine. Once again, I will not put my hand to the plough and turn back ! And now it is time to join the rest. See !” she added, pointing to the window, “they are hurrying up to the earthwork ; let us go !”

“You will not relent !” he exclaimed, in a voice of great distress as they both moved together towards the door.

“I cannot !” she answered.

“Then may God protect you, Francesca !”

“But, Rinaldo !” she said, suddenly stopping as

they were in the act of passing through the door which opened from the kitchen of the mill-house on to the open space between it and the earthwork, and drawing back a pace so as to stand a little behind the open door, and she suddenly, as she spoke, caught his hand in hers, which now again was deadly cold and trembling. She paused, and seemed to hesitate, and then went on rapidly: "Rinaldo!" she said, looking into his face for an instant and then letting her eyes fall on the ground, "I, too, have a confession at this last moment to make—which, perhaps—God forgive me if I have been hard or proud to you!—which, perhaps, I ought to have made before. There is yet another reason why I will not give up sharing this day's danger with you! If you die, I—do not care to live!"

Rinaldo seemed to himself to reel as from a blow as the words fell on his ears. He put out his hand to arrest her as she darted past him through the door the instant the words had passed her lips. But she was already on the road in front of the mill, and hurrying across the open space towards the earthwork.

Rinaldo overtook her in three or four strides, and would have spoken to her, but a shout of "*Viva l'Italia!*" burst at that moment from the line drawn up behind the earthwork. And both their voices joined in it as they took their places in the ranks.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE.

WHEN the political Carnival of Italy, of which the battle of Curtatone was one of the incidents, had come to an end, and his Serene Highness the Grand-Duke had, like the rest of the high and mighty masquers engaged in that amusing frolic, been pleased to pull off his mask and have done fooling, Field-Marshal Radetzky, visiting Florence, found General de Laugier, his old enemy at Curtatone, minister of war in Tuscany. Thus necessarily brought into communication with the Tuscan general, the Austrian veteran was pleased to speak in very complimentary terms of the resistance offered to his arms by the Tuscan contingent on that occasion ; adding, however, that it had been very fortunate for the little Tuscan force that he—

Radetzky—had been wholly ignorant of the smallness of the numbers opposed to him; for that had it been otherwise, not a man of them, he was so good as to say, would have escaped. And, indeed, it does seem probable that an army numbering from thirty to forty thousand veterans and thoroughly well-appointed troops, might have been able, as the Austrian field-marshal boasted, to utterly destroy some four or five thousand untried soldiers and University lads, if they had possessed all necessary information respecting so redoubtable a foe! Of course, such a result as that achieved at Curtatone and Montanara could only be due to want of wit, not to want of force, on the part of the immeasurably more powerful combatant. And the Austrian field-marshal's remark has a striking air of resemblance to the reflections of the giants in the nursery story-book, who were so successfully outwitted by their small antagonist.

It was a deserved triumph on the part of the Tuscan general and the ridiculously small force under his command, that their matchless audacity contributed to deceive the Austrians as to the number of the troops who ventured to stand and dispute the way with them. And a message sent by De Laugier to the Austrian general, intimating to him to lay down his arms and consider his army prisoners of war, would

have been simply a piece of absurd impudence, had it not helped to confirm the enemy in their error.

In consequence of this error, the Austrians proceeded with their usual cautious tactics, feeling their way against a foe which they could have crushed if they had only pushed onward with the weight of their numbers—have crushed as easily as the Juggernaut car crushes its victims. The first attack against the earthwork in front of the village of Curtatone was made by a regiment of Croats. The Tuscans had been instructed to reserve their fire till the enemy, utterly ignorant of what they were going to find behind the earthwork, should have come all but close to it. There is, perhaps, no command more difficult to get obeyed by young soldiers than this of reserving their fire. But on this occasion the obedience was perfect, and the result proportionately efficacious. It was a case in which intelligence was capable of supplying the want of discipline. The lads understood *why* they were to reserve their fire, and they therefore did so. The Croats were within a couple of paces of the rampart of earth, when a coolly-aimed and well-directed volley flashed forth as if fired by a single hand. The blue-jacketed “food for powder,” poor fellows, who had nothing to sustain them but habits of discipline and the fear of punishment,

and who had little reason to care a straw how the day ended, so that it would only come to an end, hesitated, staggered, and fell back, leaving several dead and dying in front of the earthwork.

Again and again the same attempt was repeated, and still the casualties on the side of the Italians were very few in comparison with the loss of the enemy. But precious minutes, which were all that the Italians hoped to gain, were being won the while. But then, after an interval, a few pieces of cannon were brought to bear on the work, behind which that part of the *Corpo Universitario* which was at Curtatone were fighting, and it was breached in three or four places. Worse than this, however, was a want of ammunition, which, after some two hours' fighting, began to make itself felt among the Italians. The infallible result of the entire ignorance and inexperience of every man and officer in the corps, was that not only many things essentially necessary for a campaign were altogether forgotten and neglected at starting, but that mistakes, oversights, and omissions of all sorts went far to paralyse the efforts of the general and the men in the hour of battle. Much mischief was occasioned also by deficiencies which no foresight or knowledge on the part of the volunteers could have remedied. Their one or two poor little guns, for instance, their ammunition waggons and ambu-

lances, were drawn, not by troop-horses duly ridden and driven by soldiers—for they possessed none such—but by post-horses and postilions, forced or lured by promise of high pay into the service. These men, as soon as they found themselves in a position of danger, went off with their horses, almost without exception, leaving the vehicles entrusted to them wherever they chanced to be.

A waggon, containing ammunition, had been left standing in the midst of the little *piazza* of the village, where it speedily became a target for the enemy's shells. It was necessary, however, to obtain the contents of the waggon so exposed. And to render the task of doing so yet more hazardous, because longer than it would otherwise have been, the key of the chest was not forthcoming. It was necessary, therefore, to break it open; and this operation had to be done while the Austrian artillery were not only sweeping with their fire the open space, which had to be crossed to reach the waggon, but were making the waggon itself the special object of their practice.

At the first demand of volunteers for this service, three lads had sprung forward to offer themselves; but though perfectly well fitted to take the ammunition from the chest, and transport it whither it was needed, no one of them looked at all as if he had such an arm as was required for the wielding

of a huge smith's hammer for the breaking open of the lock, and accomplishing that object with the least possible expenditure of time.

"That will be a job for me!" cried Varani, who, with the rest of our friends, was posted at that part of the earthwork which was nearest to the open esplanade and the waggon; "give me the hammer! I can hit a hard blow." And brandishing it as he seized it from the hand of one of the lads, he rushed with them and the officer sent in search of the ammunition across the open space. The little party had reached the waggon, and the Professor was in the act of mounting on it so as to get a fair blow at the lock of the chest, when a round shot from one of the enemy's guns killed on the spot two of the young men who had accompanied him.

"*À me! Rinaldo mio! à me!*" exclaimed Francesca, who with many others was anxiously watching the success of the little forlorn hope—for such, in truth, it might well be called—as she sprung from the rank almost at the same instant that the two lads fell by the side of the ammunition waggon, and started to support her brother.

The summons carried with it a thrill of exquisite delight to Rinaldo's heart. For he well knew that, had those few words of delicious explanation not been spoken in the kitchen of the mill-house,

Francesca would have called to her side any other of their comrades rather than him. And the “*Rinaldo mio*,” though a manner of address common enough between friends, and often meaning nothing, meant much when addressed to him by Francesca. And these were the thoughts that darted first through his brain, as he sprung out in answer to her call. But the next were of the frightful risk to which she was about to expose herself; and he could not refrain from saying so as he reached her side:

“Let some one of the others undertake this with me, Francesca *mia*!” he almost whispered, as he ventured to put a special emphasis on the last word; “for my sake, I implore you!”

“Now or never we will be together!” replied Francesca, as she started to run across the esplanade.

“Now and ever, then! Say it, Francesca! Say it, while you live to say it, and I to hear it!” rejoined Rinaldo, as they ran together side by side across the space exposed to the enemy’s fire.

“Now and ever, *amore mio*!” said Francesca, as they arrived together at the side of the waggon.

Pietro had at the same moment succeeded in smashing the lock of the ammunition chest, when, as the words passed Francesca’s lips, a shot struck the hinder wheel of the waggon on the farther

side from the front, and caused it to upset and fall over on that side. The Professor, who was standing on the top of the chest, was precipitated on to the ground; but regained his legs in an instant, and together with the officer proceeded to hand out the ammunition to the others. The operation was, in fact, not a little facilitated by the upsetting of the waggon. For, as it fell with its bottom towards the quarter from which the enemy was firing, it afforded some degree of protection to those who were engaged in getting out the ammunition, besides making it much easier to get at it.

Francesca, Rinaldo, and the survivor of the three who had originally accompanied Varani and the officer in search of the ammunition, loaded themselves with as much as they could carry, and got back with it in safety to the shelter of the earthwork. And some twenty or thirty of those who had been watching the success of the operation, as soon as they saw the chest opened, and the waggon upset, rushed across with a cry of "*Viva l'Italia!*" and succeeded in conveying the whole of the contents to the lines.

And then, and not till then, the officer and Varani, who had been distributing the ammunition to the carriers of it, recrossed the esplanade in safety.

Up to this time, no one of the little party

with whom the readers of these pages are most particularly concerned, had suffered any injury. But the casualties were becoming more and more numerous around them, and the earthwork, which has been so often mentioned, was becoming from minute to minute less tenable. In prospect of its being ultimately carried, it became desirable that an attempt should be made to hold the mill-house, the position of which on the shore of the lake has been described, as well as another isolated building, called the *Casa del Lago*, also on the immediate bank of the lake, but a hundred paces or so nearer to Mantua than the *Casa del Mulino*. This *Casa del Lago* was, in fact, situated nearly at the extremity of the earthwork on the side of the lake.

There was but little difference, as far as experience or knowledge of warfare went, between the civilian volunteers and the new soldiers of the Tuscan army;—and not very much more in point of discipline. Nevertheless, it was judged best that the more sheltered, though, perhaps, by no means less arduous, duty of defending these two posts should be entrusted to the former. A couple of squadrons, therefore, of the Florentine volunteers were placed in the *Casa del Lago*, and an equal number of the “*Corpo Universitario*” in the *Casa del Mulino*. Of these, one was that under the orders of Corporal Malatesta; and thus the Pro-

fessor and his friends, towards the latter part of the action, found themselves once again in the quarters they had quitted that morning.

The orders given to the little band in the *Casa del Mulino* were to hold the building to the last extremity. What the result might have been had they contented themselves with strictly obeying their orders, it is as difficult to say as to write many another chapter of the great history of the things which might have been. But certainly that would not have happened which did happen.

The village of Curtatone, and the buildings which have been mentioned, stand on ground a little elevated above the level of the lake, the banks of which are in that neighbourhood steep, though of no great height. The communications, therefore, between the village and the lake are steep lanes—in some cases so steep as to be more aptly termed stairs—sunk in the soil of the bank, in such sort that any one coming from the lake into the village would be hidden from those on either side of the lane or stair almost till he emerged into the village. Now, there was one of these communications with the lake in immediate proximity with the *Casa del Mulino*. It was, however, too much sunk in the bank, in the manner which has been described, to be visible from any door or window of that building, or from the

banks on either side, unless by a person standing so immediately close to it as to be able to look down into the little cutting. There was, however, one point of the mill which commanded a view, not quite of the pathway itself, but of so much of the depth of the cutting that the head and shoulders of any one coming up from the lake could at once be seen from it. This point of view was an aperture in the upper story of the mill, immediately under the roof, and higher than any of the windows of the building, made for the purpose of receiving sacks of grain, and furnished with a little projecting platform on the outside, for the landing of the sacks. From this aperture, and yet more perfectly from the projecting platform or stage, such a view of the sunken steep way or stair down to the lake, as has been described, could be obtained.

For some time after the little force, to which the defence of the mill had been entrusted, had entered it, they were allowed to remain quietly, but, as they flattered themselves, vigilantly, in possession of the building. All the best dispositions for the determined defence of the position which their imperfect knowledge of such matters could suggest to them, had been taken; the men were assigned to their different places, and the members of the little garrison had sworn, each man to himself and to his

comrades, that he would die at his post sooner than abandon it. On first taking up their position in the mill, they had supposed that an attack on it by the enemy was imminent. But as the minutes grew into quarters of the hour, and the quarters crept on till they summed nearly an hour, and still no attack was made, they concluded either that the fight was still maintained at the earthwork in advance of the village, or that a struggle for the village itself, in the rear of which the mill is situated, was still kept up by the diminished ranks of their comrades.

There was not a man—or boy—of the little party in the mill who was not thoroughly and sternly in earnest when he declared that he would die at his post sooner than surrender it. But, to the volunteer Tuscan mind this resolution was by no means understood to include any such abnegation of the prerogatives of a thinking individual as should prevent him from doing anything that might seem to him obviously conducive to the end in view. Well might the general who on that day commanded the Tuscan forces complain that while the soldiers were but little accustomed to discipline, the volunteers were wholly intolerant of it!

Now it so happened that Enrico Palmieri, who was about as capable as a kitten of strictly conforming himself to orders which enjoined him to

remain as a fixture at a certain spot for nearly an hour together, had made acquaintance, while quartered in the building, with the look-out place at the top of the mill which has been described, and took it into his head, after the party had been in suspense, vainly awaiting an attack for nearly an hour, that it would be extremely desirable to get a peep at the general state of matters from that commanding point of view. No sooner had the idea entered into his head, than, quietly stealing away, without saying a word of his purpose to any one, he ran to put it into execution. The first thing that greeted him the instant he had opened the double doors which closed the aperture, and had cautiously advanced partly out on to the stage that projected in front of them, was a bullet, which struck the eaves immediately above him. But, in the same instant, he had seen what induced him still more powerfully than the warning the bullet brought with it, to descend with all speed, and tell the result of his look-out to his companions.

On the lake, close in under the bank, at the foot of the steep passage leading up from the water to the mill, in the act of shoving their boat to the shore, was a whole boat-load of Austrian soldiers.

If the description which has been given of the localities has at all succeeded in making the reader

understand the distribution of them, he will bear in mind that the lake, as the Mincio in this part of its course is deservedly called, since it is nearly a mile in width, extends from some distance beyond Curtatone to the westward, up to the walls of Mantua, to the eastward of that village. Its waters, therefore, were entirely open to the Austrians, and offered, had any sufficient boat-accommodation been at hand, a very obvious means of turning the Tuscan position. This does not appear to have been the case to any great degree. But, at all events, one large flat-bottomed boat had been procured—one of the Mantuan ferry-boats, perhaps—and, either by keeping far out into the lake, or by more or less evading the observation of the Italians in the village and at the *Casa del Lago*, a considerable body of men—some fifty or sixty, probably—had succeeded in reaching the landing at the bottom of the bank close under the *Casa del Mulino*.

No second look was needed to make Enrico comprehend the whole extent and nature of the danger. Bounding down the garret stairs, without a thought of any need for excusing himself for his own breach of orders, he rushed into the midst of his comrades below open-mouthed with the tidings of his discovery. And in the next instant—how far justifiably, from the nature of the emergency, military

critics may decide—the whole of the party in the mill were rushing out to oppose the ascent of the Austrians from the landing-place to the top of the bank. It was already too late to oppose the landing; for at the moment that the volunteers reached the spot where the steep path from the water's edge opened on to the top of the bank, the foremost of the Austrians had already stepped on shore.

But, although the Austrian force in the boat was probably fully double the number of the Italians in the mill, and though they were old soldiers opposed to untrained boys, the enterprise of preventing them from reaching the top of the bank was not so hopeless an one as it might at first sight appear. The bank was too high, too slippery, and too steep to be climbed, except by the sunken pathway, itself sufficiently steep, which had been cut in it. This steep path was very narrow; sufficient at the utmost for three men to advance on it abreast; and it was commanded by the top of the bank on either side of it. The struggle, therefore, between the two parties, was not so wholly unequal as it would have been under other circumstances. Indeed, had the volunteers only had time or coolness enough to concert their plan of operations, or discipline enough to have carried it out unfailingly, when concerted, it is probable that they might have defied even a much larger number

of the enemy to gain a footing on the top of the bank.

As it was, they crowded pell-pell around the opening of the little gully, down which the path ran, each anxious to be foremost, and eager only to get a blow or a shot at the enemy.

The foremost of the Austrians were about half way up the path when the volunteers reached the top of it. And at the first shots exchanged in that position two Austrians fell, while their fire upwards took no effect on the volunteers. Had the Austrians at once rushed forward at that instant, they would have gained the top of the bank before the volunteers could have given them another volley. But they were taken by surprise at the sudden appearance of an enemy in front of and above them ; and when their two foremost men fell, they gave back for an instant, and hesitated long enough to give the volunteers time to repeat the same operation a second time. And this time, under their somewhat better directed fire, three Austrians were either killed or badly wounded. But now the attacking party had had their lesson ; and, instead of pausing, or attempting to return the fire of the Italians, they rushed onwards up the steep path.

Another moment, and the struggle must become a hand to hand and bayonet to bayonet death grapple. Malatesta and Rinaldo were among those

who stood immediately in front of the opening of the lane, and had fired straight down it in the face of the Austrians; and now, since the onward rush of the attacking party left them no time to load again, they stood with lowered bayonets expecting their onset. On one side of the pathway, about a couple of yards from the spot where it reached the level ground, and, therefore, allowing for the rapidity of the slope, some half yard or so above the spot in the path immediately beneath, stood the Professor, grasping the musket he had just discharged, by the muzzle, and brandishing the stock-end aloft in preparation for using it club-wise on the head of the first of the ascending party who should come within reach of its flail-like swing. By his side, also, therefore, on the brink of the cutting by which the path ascended the bank, but more inland, and therefore a little less raised above the path immediately below him, was Enrico, panting through his distended nostrils, and glaring with eyes a-flame at the coming foe. He, too, had discharged his musket; and seeing that in the coming struggle it could serve him no longer, had drawn from it the bayonet, which he grasped in his hand, prepared to use it dagger-wise. He stood on the extreme edge of the cutting, craning over with the upraised weapon in his hand, and seemed to restrain himself with difficulty from plunging down

into the gully to meet the attackers in their upward rush. On the opposite side of the gully, Francesca, with many others, was standing on the very brink of the cutting. And she, too, as well as several of those around her, had thrown aside their muskets, and armed themselves with the bayonet alone.

The Austrians, on their side also, had to trust to the bayonet only; for they had had no time to reload after firing their second volley before making their rush. But they kept their bayonets duly on their muskets, and held them in the position of charging. On they came, two foremost of the party. One of these two—that one on the side of the path on which Francesca stood—was a man of more than ordinary stature and of proportionate size and strength. The other, a smaller man, fell brained by a sweeping blow from the butt of the Professor's musket, as he reached the point in the path immediately below him. But his huge comrade, availing himself of the advantage given him by his superior tallness, which placed him more nearly on a level with the volunteers on the edge of the bank above him, at the same moment adopting the Professor's mode of using his musket, aimed a tremendous blow at the legs of those who stood on the brink on his side. The sweep of the weapon came just about the height of their knees; and,

striking there the man who stood next to Francesca, brought him and her also to the ground; the first with his knee broken. Francesca, however, though thrown down by the tremendous sweep of the blow, which knocked the injured man against and over her, remained unhurt.

But, at the same instant that the giant delivered his blow, and before he could recover his weapon, and just as the other man by his side had fallen beneath a similar blow from the Professor's musket, Enrico, unable longer to refrain, sprung bayonet in hand from the bank like a wild cat at the throat of the huge Austrian. Alas! *impar congressus!* The soldier, still pressing onward and upward, as he recovered his musket with his right hand, caught the boy with a back-handed swing of his left arm almost before he reached the ground from his spring, and hurled him back down the gully on the bayonets of the men who were pressing on from behind.

One of them entered his reins, and he fell beneath the feet of the soldiers with a shriek, which Varani to this day declares often rings in his ears!

As he saw him fall, the Professor, who had been standing by his side, a pace nearer to the lake, and so much the higher, therefore, above the path below him, sprung in like manner from the bank into the midst of the ascending soldiers. For the moment,

all thought of the object for which they were all there, of the necessity of withstanding the progress of the attackers, faded from his mind, in the one headlong desire to save Enrico. Striking back the next advancing man with the butt-end of his musket, he cleared a space for a moment, and, utterly thoughtless of what might follow in the next, threw down his weapon, while he stooped to raise the prostrate boy in his arms, and form a rampart with his own body between him and the on-coming ranks below. In the next minute they would both have been bayoneted and trampled under foot by them. But, in that same next minute, the trampling came on them from the opposite direction. For just then a party of the volunteers from the neighbouring *Casa del Lago*, having become aware of what was going on, came to support those who were at the mouth of the gully where the path from the lake reached the top of the bank. Thus reinforced, they rushed forward down into the gully; and, having the advantage of the steep descent in their favour, bore back the Austrians to the water's edge.

The fresh comers from the *Casa del Lago* had their muskets loaded, and many of the Austrians fell beneath their fire at the landing-place at the bottom of the gully. The rest saved themselves by retreating to their boat, which a few strokes of

the oar sent beneath the shelter of the bank out of reach of further fire. Some six or eight of the volunteers only had been wounded—two or three of them mortally—in their last struggle. But the rush of the attack and retreat had passed over Enrico and the Professor; and when the *mêlée* at the water's edge was over, and the volunteers turned to regain the bank, carrying their wounded up the steep path, they found Varani on the ground with a flesh wound from a bayonet in the shoulder, supporting in his arms the body of Enrico.

“Dead!” cried Francesca, who, from having been overthrown in the manner that has been described, had not been among the pursuers of the retreating Austrians to the water's edge;—“not dead!”

“No! not dead!” returned the Professor; “but badly hurt;—desperately wounded, I fear!”

“Enrico!” said Francesca, throwing herself on her knees by the side of her brother, and taking on her lap the wounded boy's head in a manner and with a tenderness that would have sufficed to betray the secret of her sex, had any one there been at leisure to take note of such matters—“Enrico! can you speak to me?”

His cap had fallen off, and as his head, upturned and thrown backward in his agony, lay in her lap, the long locks of bright golden hair fell back from

off his forehead, and the delicate features of the fair young face, so flushed and eager with animation when last she had seen them a minute or two before, as he stood with upraised bayonet in his hand on the bank opposite to her, were lividly white, save where, like his hair, they were dabbled with blood;—not from his own wound, but from that of Varani, which, though of slight consequence, was bleeding profusely. The eyes were closed, and the long lashes, long and silken as a girl's, lay dark on the pallid cheek. The small delicately-made hands were close clenched, and the mouth firmly shut, as though the boyish pride was struggling hard to suppress the cries that his agony would have forced from him. He opened his eyes for a moment when Francesca spoke to him;—for a moment long enough to give her one upturned glance as her face bent over his,—a glance which Francesca has never forgotten, and will never forget! And the firm set lips, unclosed quivering with a trembling sigh, that strove to articulate the syllables of her name, and then closed again, as his head fell back on her lap in the merciful unconsciousness of a swoon.

“Run for water, Pietro!” she cried. “He is dying! He is dying!”

And Pietro ran down to the lake along the trampled but now empty path. For the rest of

the volunteers, returning from successfully beating off the Austrians, had passed on towards the village, carrying with them the wounded; and Francesca, the Professor, and Enrico were alone in the sunken lane. With some difficulty, for his wounded arm was becoming so painfully stiff as to be nearly useless, the Professor, who had wholly forgotten his own wound, and would have been puzzled at the moment to tell why he could scarcely use his arm, dipped up some water in his cap, and hurried back with it to Francesca.

She moistened the wounded boy's lips and brow with it, and in a short time he returned to consciousness, and to suffering.

After a while they succeeded with much difficulty in raising him from the ground, and set about endeavouring to carry him the distance of only a few paces that separated them from the House of the Mill. It was not till then that Francesca, perceiving that her brother's arm was almost useless, and that he had the greatest difficulty in aiding her to carry Enrico, found out that he, too, was wounded.

"Why, you are wounded too, Pietro!" she cried; "and you never told me of it. What is it?"

"In truth, Francesca, I had well-nigh forgotten it, and should have done so quite, were it not that it makes me nearly useless. But it is nothing;—

a mere prick in the flesh. Would to God that I could exchange my hurt with his, poor boy! poor boy! so young, so bright, so full of hope!”

“But he will recover, Pietro! Don’t look so at me, brother! Don’t, Pietro!” cried Francesca, struggling to stifle a rising sob; “but we must make haste to find assistance. See now, we can carry him so to the house! You don’t think he will—not get well again, Pietro?”

But the Professor only shook his head sadly; and raising his hand to his face, made a great blur of blood across his eyes as he brushed them with the back of it.

So, slowly and painfully, they carried him to the top of the bank, and thence a step or two more to the mill-house. They found the house empty, and no one either to oppose or to aid them; for the battle of Curtatone was over.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

THE battles of Curtatone and Montanara were over. Nearly half the little band of Tuscans were killed, or wounded, or prisoners; and the rest were dispersed like chaff before the wind;—before that mighty wind of a vast Austrian army, which was now careering onwards to the westward. The Austrian victories at Curtatone and Montanara were over. But that memorable day, the 29th of May, 1848, was nearly over also; and the poor boys, over whose bodies the Austrian legions tramped, had not given their young lives in vain. The Italian army had put those gallantly bought six hours to golden profit. By the time Radetzky reached Goito, the Piedmontese generals were ready to receive him. The battle of Goito was

fought and won for the national cause, and the strong fortress of Peschiera fell.

And in Milan and Turin, in Venice, in Rome, in Florence, in Naples, and in a hundred other cities, there was a shout of rejoicing and of high hope.

But what was there in the House of the Mill by the Mincio on the battle-field of Curtatone?

A small fraction—an infinitesimal part of the great price of a nation's redemption, was being paid down there;—not unavailingly contributed towards making up the required sum!

It was but a few steps that Varani and his sister had to carry the wounded boy from the spot in the gully where he fell to the kitchen of the mill-house; but it was not accomplished without much difficulty, nor without causing much additional agony to the poor patient. He had fallen into a second swoon when they laid him on the stone floor of the kitchen. It was out of the question to think of carrying him up-stairs; and there was no article of furniture in the kitchen, save a locker against one of the walls, which was far too narrow for him to be placed on it.

There were, however, one or two beds in the upper story; and Francesca, leaving Enrico with the Professor, ran up, and hastily dragged the bedding of one of them down the stairs. Having

placed him on this, arranged as best they might, upon the floor, they bound up the gaping wound in his back as well as they could; and Francesca drew some fresh cold water from the well, and put it to his lips. The poor boy drank eagerly; and as his head fell back on the pillow after the grateful draught, he smiled faintly, and gave Francesca, as she hung over him, a look of gratitude and affection, which, though it brought the tears to her eyes, encouraged her in the hope that his hurt might not be unto death.

“Now then, Pietro, you must run and try to find some one of the surgeons,” she said, “and make him come back with you. See! he is looking better already. The water has refreshed him. Do not lose an instant!”

“But about leaving you here alone?” said the Professor, doubtfully. “The Austrians are moving on towards Goito. I can hear the hum of the march from here.”

“The road must be nearly half a mile away on the other side of the village,” answered Francesca. “There is no chance of their coming here! And if there were, our first need is a surgeon at all hazards. Run, *fratello mio*!”

“And if I do not return, you will understand, Francesca, that I have been caught and made prisoner. I would give much, too, to find Rinaldo;

but he may be far hence by this time, or—— And, Francesca, give him the water from time to time—and look to see that the bleeding does not begin afresh—and be sure that I will lose no time!”

And so Francesca and her patient were left alone together in the solitary and deserted house.

It was very still. As Francesca knelt by the side of the mattress on the flagstones, the only other sound which reached her ear, besides the slight rustle of the pillow as the poor boy turned his head from side to side in the restlessness of pain, was the distant hum of the moving army as it passed—one division of it, at least—along one of the two roads, which it had opened for itself to the westward.

Francesca remained thus motionless by the bedside for half an hour or more, and Enrico seemed to have sunk into a sort of lethargy; for it was yet nearer akin to death than sleep is. And the anxious watcher strained her ear to catch the faint sound of his breathing to assure herself that it was not death itself. She was eagerly listening, also, for the step of her brother returning from his quest; but from the outside no sound came, save the distant murmur, continuous as the sound of a waterfall.

At the end of that time Enrico opened his eyes,

and Francesca again put the water to his lips, and again he drank with avidity.

The draught appeared to revive him a little.

"Francesca!" he said, in a low quivering voice, "are we alone here? Where are the others?"

"Pietro is gone in search of a surgeon to cure your hurt, my poor Enrico! Please God, he will soon return, and then you will get, I trust, some relief from your pain."

"And you are all alone here to take care of me! How good of you, Francesca! But where are the others?"

"Not far, I dare say! They will probably return to the village when the Austrians have all passed."

"Is the battle over, then, Francesca?"

"Yes! Enrico *mio*! It is over! The Austrians are in full march towards Goito."

"What time is it, Francesca?"

"Not far from the Ave Maria."

"Then our point has been gained, eh, Francesca? You remember what Malatesta said—when was it?—this morning! How strange it seems! It appears to me as if it were a month ago, and as if so much, oh, so much had happened since! He said, you know, that if we could hold back the Austrians for a few hours, we should not give our

lives in vain ! We did keep them back, didn't we, Francesca ?”

“Dear Enrico ! I think you ought not to talk so much. The Professor will return with the doctor presently.”

“Francesca !” he said again, after the lapse of a few minutes, “let me speak to you as long as I can ! The doctor can do me no good, Francesca ! I have given my life for Italy. Many of those, who have not had the chance, will envy me.”

“Enrico ! I cannot, I will not believe that you will die ! I could not bear it !”

“Dear Francesca !” he said, and for a minute or two his mind seemed to rest only on the thought of the interest in him that she manifested.

After a few moments, he said again : “But you do not think that I am afraid to die, Francesca mia ! God is for Italy ! He will know that I have died for his cause ! And I shall be so glad to escape from this pain ! I shall not be sorry to die !”

“But, for your mother's sake, my Enrico, you must try to live and get well.”

“*Povera mamma !* she will cry for me, I know ! But, all the same, she will be proud to have had a son who died for Italy ! Yes ! *La mamma* will be proud of me ; and that consoles me for all ! Poor

dear mother! I should like to have been able to see her once again!"

"My Enrico! I trust in Heaven that you will see her and tell her all the events of this day, when you shall be quite recovered. But I think that you ought not to talk any more now. God grant that my brother may come back quickly with a doctor!"

He let his head fall back on the pillow and remained silent, though restlessly turning his head from side to side, for about a quarter of an hour.

"May I have another drink of water, dear Francesca?" he said, at the end of that time.

She put the cup to his lips, and again he took a long and eager draught.

"Dearest Francesca!" he said, a minute afterwards, "do not forbid me to speak to you! I have but a little time more to speak in! For, Francesca dear, I feel that I am getting weaker. I feel that the life is going out of me!"

"Oh! Enrico! Enrico! And my brother does not come! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Do not grieve so, good, kind Francesca! Believe me, the doctor could do me no good. I am in less pain now; but I feel that I am dying. And, Francesca," he added, after a pause, "do you know—I am glad—so glad that we are alone together. For I want very much—if I may, dear

Francesca, to speak to you—for your ear alone, before I die. May I, Francesca?”

“May you, Enrico dear!” returned Francesca, who was now struggling with her sobs; “speak freely anything and all that is in your heart to speak!”

“Will you take my hand in yours, Francesca, while I am speaking to you. I seem to see less clearly, and it is getting dark.”

She took his hand and held it, as she knelt by the side of the mattress, in both hers.

“I have been thinking a long time since I have been lying here, Francesca, whether I ought to say what I am going to say, or not. Certainly I should never have said it if I had been going to live. And—and that is one reason why I am not sorry to die. For now I think I may tell you all. Do you know, Francesca—you must not look at me so, with those kind tearful eyes! look away from me, Francesca, or I shall not be able to say it!—Do you know, Francesca, that for ever so long I have dared to love you with all my heart and all my strength;—to love you, Francesca, not as you love me, but—but as—as Rinaldo loves you! And when you were so good and kind to me, as you always were, dear Francesca, I was silly enough to hope that you, too, might love me in the same way. But when I found out that Rinaldo loved

you, Francesca, then I knew that his was a love more worthy of you than mine, and I determined—I determined never to tell you, Francesca, and never to tell Rinaldo, and to cure myself of my love. But I never could do so, Francesca! Francesca, I could not! And now I need not strive any more to do so! You see I have reason to be contented to die.”

He closed his eyes and let his head fall back on the pillow as he spoke the last words; and Francesca for a moment feared that all was already over. But the young life would not relax its hold so easily. And after a moment the fever flush, which had succeeded to the livid pallor in the first instance caused by the wound, returned to his cheeks.

Was the communication which had just been made to her by the dying boy, a surprise to Francesca? It might, perhaps, be possible to persuade the lads who may read these pages that it was so. But it would assuredly be useless to tell any such tale to the maidens. Not one among them would believe a word of it. Nor, to my own thinking, is it in any way necessary to the defence of Francesca's character, to pretend anything of the sort. She had seen plainly enough the boy's feelings towards her; and regarded them as girls of twenty are apt to regard the love-homage of boys of

sixteen;—as a little malady incident to puppy-hood, not at all dangerous, very little painful—just sufficiently so to cause a certain degree of sympathy for the sufferer, and interest in watching the progress of his malady to its natural termination in perfect recovery and robuster health than before.

Had she been displeased at his “presumption?” This phrase is a man’s phrase, and not a woman’s, in such matters. When in a man’s mouth it means anything at all—which is not in the majority of cases—it has reference in his mind not to his loving, but to the expectation of certain returns thereof. A woman whose view of the matter is bounded by a more immediate horizon, sees, if she is good for anything, no “presumption” in any man’s genuine love;—ay, or in any boy’s. And Francesca’s maternal affection for Enrico, as she always to herself, and occasionally to others, defined her feeling towards him, was certainly not made less tender by any resentment at his presumption. She did love him dearly; and any difference in the nature of their mutual feelings had been matter for only light thoughts, bright smiles, and pretty sparring words *then*, back in the sunny laughing days gone away now so far into the past. But now! now that the life-current had drifted them both out of those pleasant sun-flecked shallows

among the rapids of the hard-jagged realities that now surrounded them, with the terrible and sudden end-all near at hand for one of them—*now*, how was this confession to be received? No light word, no pretty evasion would do now, even could she have induced her tongue to utter words so much at variance with her feeling.

“You will believe, Francesca dear,” he resumed, after a few minutes, while her tears fell hot and fast upon the hand she still held between her own—“you will believe me that I should not have told you this had I been going to live. But a death-bed is always an excuse for blabbing secrets, *non è vero!* And so, you see, I have let out other people’s besides my own!—Give me a drop more water, dear!—thanks!—And give me your hand again, Francesca; I can say what I want to say better so! The truth is, Francesca, that those other people’s secrets were what I most wanted to speak to you of. It can matter little now to any one that I loved you; though I can die more contented for your knowing it;—but you don’t know how much I loved you, *ve’!*”* he said, parenthetically, with a look up into her eyes that went to the very core of her heart;—“but I wanted to tell you, Francesca, how Rinaldo loves you! You would never find it

* *Ve’*, is short for “*vedi*,” *see*. It is a very common Tuscan colloquialism, nearly equivalent to “mind you.”

out! He will never tell you. And oh, Francesca! it is a love that deserves a return! He has such a noble heart! And—Francesca *mia!* I should die so happy if I could think that you two understood each other, and would make the happiness of each other! Does your heart say nothing to you in his favour, Francesca?”

“It has said much, my dear, dearest *brother*,” said Francesca, laying a special emphasis on the word; “Rinaldo knows that I love him;—that I am his!”

“Francesca! *mi pare impossibile!** And Rinaldo said to me nothing of his happiness?”

“He has had no opportunity of doing so, my Enrico! He was like you. Only the prospect of death forced his secret from him. It was only this morning that he told me he loved me, when we were going out to the battle, with little expectation of surviving it!”

“And then you owned that you loved him! *O bravi!* To think that there should be people who need such a moment before they can confess that they love each other! So our battle has been good for something else besides keeping back the Austrians for a day!”

“And you too, my dearest brother! Did you ever tell me that you loved me till you supposed

* “It seems to me impossible.”

—I trust in God most erroneously—that your life was nearly over?”

“My love, Francesca! but that was so different. Rinaldo has a right to pretend to any woman’s love! But, Francesca dear, my sweet sister, I warn you not to fancy that I shall ever leave this room. I know, though the pain is much less, that I am dying. But you have made me so happy. I am so contented to die! And, Francesca,” he added, after a pause, and looking at her wistfully as he spoke; “God forgive me, if it is wrong to have such feelings; but though I told you that I had determined to cure myself of loving you, when I knew that Rinaldo’s life was centred in you, and it is the truth; all the same, I fear, that I should not be able to live contented. It is better, sister dear, as it is!”

“Would to God that my brother would return! If only we could get the surgeon!”

“Trust me, Francesca dear, it would be of no use! But I should like to see the Signor Professore again before I die, to thank him for all his goodness to me. He was always very kind to me, the dear old Professor! You will tell him, Francesca, that I thought of him!”

He lay silent for some time after this; and Francesca, as she anxiously watched him, could not avoid seeing symptoms that warned her of the

truth of his own presentiments. The breath came shorter and with greater difficulty; and cold drops of perspiration gathered on his brow, the fair white expanse of which was fading to a greyish ashy tint, that even to Francesca's inexperienced eyes was ominous of the coming change.

After some time, during which Francesca had remained kneeling on the flags by the bedside, painfully listening in the dead silence and the now rapidly increasing darkness to the dying boy's laboured breathing, and striving to catch the hoped-for sound of her brother's footsteps, Enrico, after turning his head restlessly once or twice on the pillow, raised the heavy eyelids from his glazing eyes, and said:

"There is only one thing, Francesca *mia*, that makes me unhappy! I am contented—happy to die for the cause of Italy; but this wound!—I wish, I wish, sister dear, that it was *in front*! It will perhaps be thought—that—that I was turning my back on the Austrians! But I was not! It is an ugly thing—a wound behind!"

"But we all know how your wound was received! All saw it! Who of us will not tell to all Tuscany that Enrico Palmieri was but too ready to front the enemy! Ah me! my Enrico, too ready! Trust me, my brother, that all Tuscany shall know that no wound endured this day

was more gallantly received than yours ! You turn your back to the enemy !”

“Thanks, Francesca ! Tell Rinaldo that I leave it to him to do justice to me on this point. He knows that I was attacking, and not giving way, when I got this ugly poke in the back !

He fell back on the pillow once more, exhausted and panting.

Again, after a while, he spoke with obviously increased difficulty.

“One thing more, Francesca ! I am going, Francesca *mia*. Will you kiss me, Francesca, before I die ?”

“My own Enrico ! my child ! my dear, dear boy !” cried Francesca, as with the tears streaming from her eyes she took his head in her arms, and again and again kissed his cheeks and his forehead “oh, Enrico, Enrico ! No help ! No help !”

Again there was a long silence ! It was now quite dark ; and Francesca did not know where to find the means of obtaining a light, even if she could have left the bedside of the now evidently dying boy. Nothing broke the deadly silence save his panting ; and once, the clang of the bell from the clock tower of the neighbouring village.

Presently, Francesca felt the hand which she was still holding in hers tighten its grasp on hers ; and he said with low words, sighed out one by one,

“Dirai—dunque—alla—mamma—perchè—la—
mia—ferita—non—era—davanti!” *

Then again, after awhile:

“*Addio!* Francesca,—Francesca *mia!*—and—
Francesca!—*Viva l'Italia!*”

Those were his last words!—as they were the
last of many a young life that day!

* “You will tell mamma, then, how it was that my wound was
not in the front.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETURN.

ONLY gradually came to Francesca's mind the certainty that the living and loving spirit had escaped; and that she was kneeling beside a dead thing of refuse clay—a form dear still and awful yet a little while! How many minutes the soul still lingered, ere it struggled itself free, after that last utterance, Francesca had no means of knowing. It was the first time that she had ever stood face to face with death.

The laboured breathing became fainter and fainter so gradually, that she could not have said when it altogether ceased. Still more gradually the hand she held became colder. Was this death? A great fear came over her; but she struggled against it. She had often heard of long

fainting-fits. Probably this was a case in which such phenomena were likely to occur. Surely, surely, so bright, so full, so young a life could not thus easily and quickly be extinguished.

But the minutes slowly succeeded each other in long sequence. The dreadful silence seemed as if it pressed upon her with an ever-increasing weight. She ventured to press the hand she was still holding,—the hand so sensitive but a few minutes ago to each touch of hers. No answering pressure came! Then a sudden overmastering rush of fear forced from her a shrieking call, “Enrico! Enrico!” But neither sound nor movement answered her. Still it seemed to her that Death was too great a thing to have entered there so secretly and unannounced! Did the King of Terrors walk abroad with so little state?

For some time past it had been quite dark in the large empty room, which had been the kitchen and main living-room of the mill. It was lighted only by the door, and by one large window high up in the lofty wall on the southern side. And the mattress on which Enrico lay had been placed by Francesca and her brother on the floor against the opposite side immediately facing the window. This was far too high in the wall for anything to be seen from it of the immediate vicinage of the mill, for it had been necessary to raise it above

the roof of an adjoining outhouse; the possibility of mounting on which from the outside had suggested the expediency of defending the large window by a prison-like grating of massive iron bars, the squares of which repeating themselves in the daytime on the opposite floor and wall in checkers of golden light, divided by sharp black lines, served the inmates for a time-measure as the shadows crept up the wall, as the sun looked more and more horizontally through the bars of the opposite aperture.

The squares of golden light had been high on the wall above the head of the bed when Enrico had been laid there. But the light had gone out before his own; and the portion of blue sky seen through the window had become grey, and from grey had turned to black, in sympathy with the similar change in progress on the floor below. It was a starless night; and when the last of the daylight had departed, the great lofty kitchen of the mill had remained perfectly dark. And the darkness made it more difficult for the inexperienced ignorance of Francesca to determine whether she were really in the presence of Death himself or not.

But just as that cry of agonised misgiving, "Enrico! Enrico!" had escaped from her,—to which no answer had come from sound or from movement,—an answer came from the evidence of

another sense. Just then, sailing on her way high in the heavens, the punctual unconscious moon looked through the bars and laid a cold serene kiss on the dead boy's forehead.

Then Francesca knew the truth. The features of the fair young face looked handsomer in outline than they had done even in life. But the lips were rigid, the open eye was meaningless; and it was as if an ashy veil was drawn between the face and the eye which looked on it. The expression of the features was stern and defiant. For that last cry of "*Viva l'Italia!*" which were the last words that had passed his lips, was the expression of the last thought that had lived in his brain; and the impress of it had been fixed on the features that were never more to express any other.

The serene, careless moonbeam told all to Francesca's single glance.

She let the slender dead hand, so 'ghastly white in the moonlight, fall from hers, and started backwards from the bedside with a suppressed cry. For the physical horror which warm life has of cold death was strong upon her. It was the first time that she had ever felt the icy shock of his touch.

But in the next instant moral sentiment overpowered physical sensation. She threw herself forward on the bed, and clasping the pale forehead

to her bosom, burst into a tempest of sobs that seemed to shake her frame to its centre.

When the violence of this paroxysm had exhausted itself, she remained crouched by the side of the mattress on the flagstones, gazing abstractedly at the motionless face so white beneath the moon-beam, while her mind, half stunned by the shock it had encountered, was striving with a sort of dreamy uncertainty to revive the events and thoughts of the past day. It all seemed to her like the story of a long past time! It was but this morning, she told herself, but a few hours ago, that my brother was speaking to us all in this room, and when he asked if any there would yet turn from the danger before them, and save their lives, *he* interrupted him!—the first to scorn the thought! “What! can you dream of it?” cried the boyish voice, and the colour flushed up in his delicate cheek, and his eye flashed!

And, as the thought passed through her mind, she pointed with her open hand to the face that would flush no more, and shook her head slowly, while the tears burst afresh from her eyes.

Then came the thought of those last minutes at the door, before she and Rinaldo went out to take their places at the earthwork. They had been but a couple of minutes there at the utmost! But they were of those minutes which memory stores

up among its choicest treasures for all future years on this side of the grave—and who shall say it may not guard them for the eternity beyond it?—minutes the most fateful and memorable of all a woman's life, which concentrate in them the essence of years! Yet they seemed to her to belong to the history of some long past phase of her existence! It was impossible to her to shake off the illusion. It was as though there were a great gulf between all those things and the actual present.

But from dwelling on what had passed between her and Rinaldo, her mind naturally recurred to the feelings in connexion with that subject which had so deeply stirred—but a few minutes ago—the brave and loyal heart now still for ever! The words still rang in her ears, “I strove to cure myself of my love for you, Francesca! But I could not do it! I could not do it! And so it is best that I should die!” The noble, generous heart! How many minutes since the living blood mantled in the white cheek there, as he told his guarded secret! “Will you kiss me, Francesca, before I die?” he said.

And again bursting into passionate weeping as the thought reproduced itself in her mind, she flung herself on the bed and pressed her lips to the cold cheek.

Recovering herself after a minute or two, she sank back into her previous attitude at the bedside, her head sunk on her bosom, and her extended arms pendant in front of her, in that position which, in the *Sommariva Magdalen*, so eloquently expresses the unutterable extremity of helpless woe. And so, remaining motionless for some time, her thoughts gradually came down to the passing moment, and the consideration of what action was needed in the circumstances before her.

She had a somewhat vague idea that it behoved her to perform certain services to the dead. She had heard such things spoken of in a general way. But the only duty of which she was aware specifically, was that of closing the eyes. That she had often heard spoken of. She ought to close the dead boy's eyes. But she found it difficult to make up her mind to do this. It seemed to her like an act of ratification and consent to death's deed—as if by that act of her own she would be accepting and admitting it as irrevocable. It was as a rolling of the stone to the door of the sepulchre, and giving a finality to the great separation which had taken place.

They had been such true-hearted, honest eyes, so beaming with affection ! so full of mirth, intelligence, and archness ! tender, merry, bold, pensive eyes by turns. Now to be shut by her hand for

ever and ever! And as she kneeled and gazed, and let her mind sink into a sort of numbed reverie, a strong disinclination, almost a fear of moving and breaking the deep silence, came over her. The moon had now begun to go down, and was causing the reflexion of the bars of the grating before the window to move upwards across the face of the dead in strongly marked black bands. And the dark shadows as they passed over the white features seemed to impart to them a strange and changing expression, which riveted her attention against her will, and fascinated her gaze. Two bars had slowly travelled across the face, the second reproducing in its turn the variations of expression which she had fancied, as she watched the first playing its weird tricks of light and shade with the features.

The second bar had made its slow progress upwards, had shaded the open eyes, and was lying like a dark frown on the pale brows. It seemed to her imagination as if the dead were exposed, by means of her neglect to perform those last duties to the beloved face, to the fantastic floutings of the moonbeam. And yet she could not rouse herself to do the needed office.

"When next he frowns," she said to herself, binding herself to abide by the indication of some circumstances beyond her own control, as people

will when they dread to put their hand to something which they know must inevitably be done—"when next he frowns, I will do it."

And she remained immovable in her crouching attitude, watching, with a kind of entranced attention, the third bar slowly moving over the face in its upward progress.

But the sign, which seemed so certain to arrive in its course, was intercepted before it was due. While the third bar was yet deepening the shadow of the down on the upper lip, an object interposed between the moonbeam and the window, threw all the dead face into shadow. The effect excited Francesca's imagination too strongly for her to be able at first to divert her attention to the cause of it. But presently the shadow which obscured the moonlight took the form of a colossal silhouette on the wall above the bed-head.

Francesca was painfully startled, though, in the agitation of the moment, the natural and obvious explanation of the phenomenon did not, in the first moment, occur to her. Yet there was no mixture in her disturbance of any one of the many forms of that superstitious feeling which we are apt to connect with the immediate presence of Death and of his work. Nor had any such feeling contributed to the emotions which had swept over her like a storm-wind during the hours of her solitary

night-watch with the dead. The Italians are very much less susceptible to such feelings than the people of Northern Europe. It is evident, of course, that the mind may be free from such terrors, either by being above or by being beneath them. The philosopher and the savage are alike exempt from them. A due conception of, and habitual intercourse with, the invisible will banish them from the mind; and a tendency to wholly ignore the invisible will prevent their entrance into it. Now, whether for good or for evil, whether for strength or for weakness, whether much or little modified by education and other circumstances, the natural tendency of mind in the Latin races is not to busy itself with those images and ideas of the invisible world which make so large a part of the furniture of northern minds. Pupils of a gayer, brighter, more sunny, and more smiling nature, they are less apt to seek aliment for their imaginative faculties beyond its limits. And their superstitions are, accordingly, for the most part gay, material, poetical, but unspiritual in their nature. Even the ideas and images belonging to a religion which busies itself mainly with the interests, and draws its sanctions wholly from the revelations, of the unseen world, have been materialised by the natural tendencies of the Latin mind, instead of any assimilation in a contrary sense having taken place.

Francesca, then, had not suffered from such superstitious terrors during her solitary watch with the dead as would have been likely to assail an English girl in a similar case. The pain from which she had suffered was entirely of an emotional, and in no degree of an imaginative, nature. A second instant of reflection, therefore, was sufficient to enable her to attribute the shadow on the wall to its proper explanation. But it was a more difficult point to determine whether the owner of the head that made it were more likely to be friend or foe, and to ameliorate or to render yet worse the position in which she was. But the urgent need of help that impelled her to see a relief in the coming of any human being, soon decided her to wish for the presence of the new comer.

She turned, therefore, to the window, without rising from her knees, and seeing that the man was evidently engaged in taking note of the occupants of the kitchen, made a gesture of vehement entreaty that he would come to her.

"*Chi vive?*" demanded a voice from the window, in answer to her beckoning.

"*Viva l'Italia!*" replied Francesca, in a voice restrained by a kind of fear that such a cry might disturb the repose of the dead.

"*Er viva l'Italia! Eccomi, compagno!*"* I will be with you in a moment."

* "Here I am, comrade."

And in as short a time as could suffice for clambering down from the roof of the outhouse, the door of the kitchen was opened, and a man, dressed like a Lombard peasant, stood on the floor in the moonlight.

"Fine times these are!" he said, pausing, as he spoke, near the door, still apparently in some doubt whether he should venture to advance into the room, "when a man is fain to examine his own house on the sly through the window before he dares to enter it!"

"Are you the master of the house, Signore; you are the miller, then?"

"If you tried a hundred times you could not come nearer to the mark! I am Domenico Vanni, the miller of Curtatone, at your service. And, considering the sort of times we are living in, perhaps you would not hold it to be an unpardonable breach of good manners if I were to ask who you are?" said the miller, still standing near the open door, and hesitating apparently to advance till he was better assured of the character of the occupants of his dwelling.

"We are volunteers belonging to the *Corpo Universitario* of the Tuscan contingent—that is to say, *I am*," added Francesca, as a pang shot through her heart at the thought evoked by her use of the plural pronoun.

“Yes! you are Tuscan, and no mistake, by your talk! But who is your comrade, then?”

“He *was* a member of the same corps!”

“*Was!* He is one of the killed, then, your comrade, eh? Poor lad! poor lad! There are but too many of them. And are you all alone here with him? Are you sure that there is nobody else in the house?”

And then Francesca explained how they had brought the wounded volunteer from the scene of the fight in the gully to the quarters they had occupied before the battle; how one of their companions had gone in search of a surgeon, and had never returned; and how no surgeon was any more needed!

“*Ahi! poveracci!*” exclaimed the miller, shrugging his shoulders; “never returned with the surgeon! I should think not! That’s what war means! Ah, let them say what they will, it is an ugly business this war! Why, your friend got caught by the enemy; of course he did. They hold possession of the village now! There’s parties of them prowling about in all directions. And so the poor lad yonder died before any help could come to him! Mayhap he would have died all the same if he had had all the doctors in Padua! Why, Heaven bless us! he is but a boy—a mere child!” cried Domenico Vanni, as, having at length

advanced into the room, and found the means of lighting a lamp which had been left on the kitchen hearth, he stood at the foot of the mattress, and looked down upon Enrico's face—"a mere child!" he went on, shaking his head sadly. "Why, what can they be thinking of in Tuscany to send such as that poor boy to fight the Austrians! Ah! let them say what they will, war is an ugly—Halloo! who are you? And where do you come from? Though, for the matter of that, one may partly see where you last came from."

The interruption was caused by, and the miller's interpellation was addressed to, a man who had rushed in at the still open door, and on seeing the miller standing and looking down on the bed, while Francesca, who had raised herself from her kneeling position, stood at the bed-head, and gazed also tearfully down at the form that lay on it, stopped short in the middle of the floor. The latter words of the miller had reference to the plight in which the new comer's dress was. As he stood on the flagged floor of the kitchen a small pool of water began to accumulate round him from the draining of his garments. He had evidently very recently come from beneath the surface either of the lake or of the little stream of the Osone. He had no cap nor other covering on his head, and there were long clinging stems and leaves of water-plants, and plenty of mud, hanging about his clothes.

“Good Heavens ! Pietro !” exclaimed Francesca, for the dripping new comer was no other than the Professor, “where have you been, and what has happened to you ? I waited for you so anxiously ! But——” She pointed with her hand to the body of Enrico, and shook her head sadly, as a great sob, despite her efforts to suppress it, stopped her utterance.

“This is the comrade, then, who went to look after the surgeon !” said the miller. “Do the doctors make the river-beds their *recapiti** in Tuscany, I wonder ?”

“What has happened to you, Pietro ; and what kept you away so long ?” said Francesca.

“I could find no help near !” said Pietro ; “and in endeavouring to make my way to Montanara, I was made prisoner by a party of the enemy.”

“Of course you were ! That’s what war means ! They may say what they will, but war is a very ugly business !” said the miller, who seemed to have been deeply impressed with that sentiment by the events of the few last days.

“The party who captured me had taken several other prisoners,” continued the Professor, “and as they were bringing us along towards Montanara in

* “Recapito” is a house of call. Medical men in Italy are generally to be found not at their own houses, but at the apothecary’s, where they either sit if not busy, or call from time to time, to see what messages may have been left for them.

the dark before the moon rose, I managed to make a bolt, and avoided being caught again by throwing myself into the little river here behind, and remained with only my head out of water under the bank till they gave it up. They did not search very long; and I suppose one poor devil of a volunteer prisoner, more or less, does not make much difference to them."

"You see, Pietro!" said Francesca, waving her hand mournfully towards the mattress on the floor.

"Poor boy! poor dear boy! Would to Heaven, Francesca, that I were on that bed in his stead! But Italy must have not only lives, but the most precious lives!"

"That's what war means!" put in the miller; "they may say what they will——"

"But as for the doctor, Francesca," continued her brother, forgetting for the second time to substitute the masculine for the feminine termination of her name, "there is no need to grieve over *that*. I was very sure that it was a hopeless case!"

"Ah! poor lad! That's what I said to this—what did you say was the name of this *Signorino*, Signor Pietro?" said the miller, with that quickness to catch and address a new acquaintance by his name, which is a characteristic of Italian manners. For he had not failed to notice Pietro's address to his sister.

“ Francesco Varani, my cousin. I am Pietro Varani, Professor in the University of Pisa, at your service, Signore—both of us volunteers in the *Corpo Universitario*,” answered Pietro.

“ Oh! because you called the young gentleman *Francesca*! Not that I have any wish to pry into secrets. One does not know whom one is speaking to in these times! But that is what war means! They may say——”

“ *Ecco, Pietro!*” interrupted Francesca. “ This is Signor Domenico Vanni, the miller of Curtatone, and this is his house. Since you have called me by my own name, it will be best to tell Signor Domenico the truth. I am the Professor’s sister, Signor Domenico! And when all my friends at Pisa were enrolling themselves for this war, I, like a headstrong girl, insisted on going with them. That’s all! and I do not repent of what I have done! The poor boy who lies there, Signor Domenico, was my brother’s pupil, and very dear to both of us. Among all who have given their lives for Italy in this battle, there is not one”—and there were tears in her voice as she said the words —“ not one who more gallantly did his part, or more gloriously gave his life, than that poor boy, Enrico Palmieri, Signor Vanni! He was not sixteen!”

“ Poor little fellow!” said the miller, looking

down with sympathy on the young face—"poor boy! But that's what war means!—And what are you going to do now, Signor Professor? The night is getting on; and I need hardly tell you, that if you are here at daybreak, you and the young—you and your cousin, that is, will very soon find yourselves in a prison inside Mantua."

"That would be bad for my sister," said Pietro; "but what can be done?"

"Why, I should say, *not* stay here!" returned Vanni, "though it sounds inhospitable in me to tell you so! I should say, pass the Osone, avoid Montanara, get across the fields to Crosette in the dark, then make for the Oglio. If you can cross the river at the bridge of Gozzuolo, you are safe, and will fall in with plenty of your friends. But your only chance is to try it while the darkness lasts. The moon is almost down."

"If we could only find our way across the country!" said the Professor, doubtfully.

"But for him!" said Francesca; "I cannot leave him so! Pietro *mio*, I cannot do it!"

"But, *per Dio!* *cara mia Signora*, you will have to leave him at daybreak! You don't fancy those Austrian animals will leave you to bury your dead! If you are here at break of day, off you go to Mantua; and it is little they'll care what becomes

of the dead. Lord bless you! That is what war means!"

"It is, as Signor Vanni says," returned the Professor; "*Pur troppo!** that is what war means! Even if we took no care for ourselves, we could accomplish nothing for him!"

"But to leave him so! What—what shall I say to——his mother!"

"*Ecco!*" said the kindly miller; "I'll do as I would be done by! Not that I mean that I want anybody to—but, Santa Madonna! I may tomorrow; for that's what war means! See now, *caro mio*; leave his poor body to me. I promise you it shall have Christian burial. I will do for him as I would for my own son. He shall lie in the *Campo Santo* of Curtatone; and when any of his friends come to see where he has been laid, they shall find a decent cross on the spot, with his name, poor boy! Enrico Palmieri, you said. I will have it put over his grave: 'Enrico Palmieri, died for Italy at Curtatone, in his sixteenth year! That is what war means!' You may tell his friends that Domenico Vanni, the miller of Curtatone, promised to put that epitaph over his grave."

"Thanks, friend! for the good deed!" said the

* "Only too much!" the expression is a very frequently recurring one.

Professor. "There are people in Tuscany who will not forget the name of Domenico Vanni!"

"You shall have the gratitude and the blessings of a mother, Signor Vanni, and—and——" But her lip quivered, and she turned away her face, unable to complete her sentence, putting out her hand, however, to the good miller, and exchanging with him a kindly grasp as she did so.

"And now," said he, "since we have made friends, I must first see what can be done to help you. You would hardly find your way across the country, even if you knew the direction; for it is all intersected with canals and streams. And if you follow the road, the chances are you will fall in with some patrol of the Austrians, and be taken prisoners. I suppose I must go with you as far as Crosette myself."

"It would be a very great kindness," said the Professor, simply. "I know not how we can thank you for such an offer."

"*Che, che!* What are you here for? Are you not here to do me a much greater service; me and everybody else, *per Bacco*, if you can only rid us of these dogs of Austrians! If Italians can't help one another at such a pinch, they deserve to pay Austrian taxes, and brook Austrian insolence, and be vexed by Austrian police to the day of judgment. Let's be going! There is no time to lose!"

"Must we leave him—so—all alone?" said Francesca, tearfully.

"*Cara mia Signorina!*" answered Vanni, "*che vuole?** what else is to be done? Trust to me to do all that you would have done! And as for leaving the body here, poor fellow, the few hours I shall be absent, it is very unlikely that any soul should come here before daybreak; and I shall be back, if we go at once, very soon after that. And if an Austrian patrol should poke their ugly snouts into the place, what do you think they could do? Dead bodies are plenty enough outside there; and the burying parties will be going round in the course of the day. But I shall be back before that."

"Signor Vanni says well, Francesca! Besides, we have no choice! Let us go!"

Francesca threw herself on her knees on the spot by the side of the mattress, where she had been kneeling through so long a portion of the night, and, taking a pair of scissors from her knapsack, cut off a long lock of the bright curly hair, and then, rising to her feet, took a last long look at the innocent young face, which she could fancy had already settled into a deeper calm than that which seemed to sit on it immediately after death.

Then she said, "I am ready, Pietro!" and,

* "What would you have?"

striving to suppress the sobs which would struggle up from the heart to the lips, she followed her brother and Domenico Vanni into the fresh air of the approaching dawn.

Thanks to the good miller's perfect knowledge of the country, they arrived by paths across the fields, which no stranger could have found, especially by night, in perfect safety at Crosette, without having encountered a living soul indeed by the way, though so much life was stirring at no great distance from them.

There the miller left them, again assuring them that his first care on his return should be to see to the trust which he had undertaken.

"You will have no difficulty now," he added, "in finding your way to the Oglio, and you ought to reach it about sunrise. Addio, Signor Professore! Addio, Signor Francesco! Mayhap I may some day talk over this night's work with a certain Signorina Varani. Perhaps I may never get the chance of doing so. Any way, I will write to Pisa. In these times one makes friends with people that one never heard of yesterday; and that one may never see again next day. That's what war means!"

And so they parted.

The two fugitives reached the village of Gazzuolo, on the Oglio, safely, crossed that river by the bridge

there, and thence made their way in greater security to Viadana, on the Po, where many of the dispersed and wounded of the volunteers had assembled, and where every kindness and attention was shown them by the authorities and by the inhabitants. Subsequently they reached Brescia, where the *Corpo Universitario* was finally broken up.

There, also, they found Rinaldo, and were able, for the first time, to go over the melancholy roll-call of the sad remnant of their little band. Very many less than half the number of those who had so gaily marched out from Pisa were there. But it was impossible as yet to know with any accuracy how many had fallen on the field, how many were in the Mantuan dungeons, and how many were lying badly wounded in the houses of private citizens, who had hospitably received them.

At Brescia, too, the Professor received the following letter from Malatesta :

“ Turin, July, 1848.

“ DEAREST FRIEND,—

“ You will of course have learned from our friend Rinaldo the circumstances under which I received and obeyed a summons hither. The affair of the repulse of the attempted landing by the Austrians from the lake close to the mill seems to have been considered more important, and to have attracted greater attention, than it would ever have occurred

to any one of us to attribute to it. *Pur troppo*, it will ever be memorable to us on other grounds. The rush down the gully, which finally crippled and drove off the Austrian attack, and in which I happened to be foremost, and may be said to have led the men merely because I *was* foremost, was most generously reported to the Piedmontese chiefs by the officer who led the little body that joined us from the *Casa del Lago*, and who, as it happens, is a Piedmontese well known in their service,—in *our* service, that is to say ; for, in truth, therein lies the main purport of this letter. His Majesty has been pleased to offer me a commission in the Piedmontese army ; and it has been intimated to me in the most flattering terms, that if my superiors have reason to become confirmed in the opinion they have been led to form of me, I may look to receiving my captaincy by the end of the year. I am given to understand, in short, that a captain's commission was to be the reward for the service, which they are pleased to think I rendered at Curtatone, and that I should pass the inferior grades merely as a matter of form. You may guess, my dear friend, how great has been the pleasure this has given me, and how much it exceeds the most sanguine hopes I had dared to form. You do not know all the reasons I have for the delight the attainment of this first step on the ladder has

given me ; but I look forward to the pleasure of making you some day understand it. Meanwhile, be very sure that I have in no degree lost sight of the great object of which we talked together just before leaving Pisa. I still hold the discovery of my cruelly wronged and unfortunate mother to be the most sacred object of my life. It is impossible for me at present to be absent from Turin. But I doubt not before long, probably before the close of the year, or in the early spring, to be able to obtain a short leave of absence, when I shall at once go to Bologna. But, before that, we shall have exchanged letters more than once, I hope. Say for me all I would say to—alas ! that I should have to write it—to the survivors of our expedition. Make them understand how thoroughly I feel that the brilliant gallantry of each and all of them—of those who fell that day for Italy, as well as of those who still live for her—contributed fully as much as anything I could do to the result which has made my success.

“ Believe me, my dear Professor,

“ Always your attached and affectionate friend,

“ GIULIO MALATESTA.”

Very shortly after the receipt of this letter the little party of three, the Professor—Francesca, and Rinaldo—were on their way back to Pisa. Very

many of the volunteers, who were wholly unprovided with means, had to be passed on their homeward route from commune to commune, till they once again reached their homes. With Varani and his friends matters were somewhat better; and their return journey was accomplished more quickly, and with somewhat greater comfort.

The meeting of Francesca and Rinaldo after their separation on the scene of the struggle at the landing-place, in the manner which has been described, was marked by a singular mixture and conflict of feelings. They met with the consciousness of a great and mutual sorrow overshadowing the heart of either of them—a sorrow which had to be shared between them, and the bitterness of which had to be tasted together. Yet the meeting was happiness, such as neither of them had ever before known. It seemed as if the bringing together of two sorrows had, by some mysterious moral chemistry, made a joy. It was not without a certain amount of compunction and self-accusation that they admitted to themselves the undeniable fact that they were happy. And when Francesca recounted to Rinaldo every detail of the story of that last sad night in the kitchen of the mill—when, with blushes, reticences, and tearful downcast glances, she revealed to him that dying confession of the tender, generous heart, which it

would have been such treason to his memory to conceal,—when she described to him the poor boy's love, and the self-renunciation of it, and the pleading with her of his failing voice for that love in behalf of his brother which he had not dared to ask for himself, the tears that were shed together were sweet rather than bitter. They grieved; but grieving together was happiness.

The dawn succeeds the darkness; and as normally and inevitably does the healthy heart turn from past sorrow to new-springing gladness.

END OF BOOK III.



BOOK IV.

THE URSULINES AT MONTEPULCIANO.

CHAPTER I.

STELLA'S PATRIOTISM.

ANOTHER Carnival had come and gone in Florence. It was the summer of 1849; and this time Italy's political Carnival was over also. The Holy, the Imperial and Royal, and the most serene masquers had thrown off their masks, given over their pleasant fooling, and appeared to the somewhat mystified world in their own characters and colours again. The Holy Father was once more every inch a Pope; and in Florence his Royal and Imperial Highness had left so far behind him the days when he gave his paternal blessing to eager and enthusiastic youths on their setting forth to drive out the Austrian from Italy, that he had hospitably, and with every manifestation of glad welcome, received an Austrian garrison in his own capital.

Yes! there were the white coats in the streets,

in the *piazze*, in the theatres, in the cafés, in the barracks, and in the Grand-Ducal palace of Florence. There were not many of them in the houses of the Florentines. But that was in no degree occasioned by any want of kindly condescension on the part of the various distinguished corps who found themselves quartered in the City of Flowers. Those white-coated warriors desired nothing better than to grace the festivities of the Florentines with their presence. If the cost of keeping them and lodging them on the best and in the best of the land pressed hardly on the subjugated city, they were ready and willing to earn their salt by dancing, and dancing remarkably well too, with all the Florentine ladies, as often as ever they should be called upon to do so. And if the perverse fair ones would not take the goods provided for them by the Viennese gods in this kind, they had only themselves to thank for their folly.

There were not, then, many Florentine houses in which the Austrian officers were seen. But there were a few. And if the reader has estimated aright his acquaintance the peerless Contessa Zenobia, he will not doubt that the Palazzo Altamari, in the Via Larga, was one of the few in which the "*biancheria*"*—as the Florentines dis-

* The "white stuff," literally. The "things for the wash," in allusion to the white Austrian uniform.

respectfully termed their Austrian guests—was always welcome. The Contessa Zenobia was a liberal, or at least had been so, when liberalism was in fashion in high places. And now it could hardly be said that she was, or at least that she had any distinct consciousness of being, a political renegade. It was not so much that she had any strong desire of paying court to the upper powers, as that it was a matter of course to her to be on the side of “the military.” It is very possible that she considered herself to be still taking the liberal side of the social world. The military represented that side in those days, which had made her what she was, from which she drew her ideas, and to which she referred everything.

To Zenobia the presence of the Austrians in Florence was a matter of unmixed satisfaction. The heels of her boots became higher than ever; the liberality with which the exquisite symmetry of the inch or two of silk-stockings above the boot,—“all blood and sinew there, my dear!” as Zenobia was wont to say of the poor dry old shank,—was displayed to the eyes of admiring mortals, became more remarkable than before; and the *gaillardise* of her talk bolder than ever. The efforts she made to attract the new comers to her home, and, above all, to induce a few among them to attend a “*roovelly*” occasionally, were untiring; and, like

all untiring efforts, were in a great measure successful.

It will be easily understood that the success which attended the Contessa Zenobia's exertions in this line were not a little facilitated by the presence of Stella in the Palazzo Altamari. The result would have been more entirely satisfactory had the aunt and the niece been able to work harmoniously to the same end. But this was, unhappily, not by any means the case.

In fact, Stella's second Carnival had been to her a very different affair from that of last year. It was a very different season in Italy altogether. Doubt, discouragement, and misgiving, had succeeded to the golden illusions and high hopes which had given the key-note to the national feeling in the spring of 1848. It was a melancholy Carnival in Florence in 1849. And though the Palazzo Altamari was one of the houses in which a revelry distasteful to the general feeling was kept up, the Carnival was yet duller and more distasteful to Stella than to the rest of the world. Not that she was unhappy. The tidings of Malatesta's promotion and success had given her the warmest pleasure. It not only afforded a gratification to her heart infinitely more exquisite than any amount of praise or honour awarded to herself could have produced, but it appeared to her to remove the

only conceivable obstacle to her union with Giulio. No! Stella was not unhappy. It is not within the power of fate to make a girl of eighteen, who is conscious of being loved by the man she loves, unhappy. But she was desperately bored by the gaieties of her second Carnival. The very same things that had been pleasant enough a year before were now worse than insipid. She had danced many a dance last time with people that she cared not a straw about. But the light of the sunshine was over it all! There was a certain eye looking on. There was the expectation, the finessing, the little hopes and fears and triumphs, all exceedingly pleasant. The sportsman, who makes up a fair bag by the end of the day, does not by any means consider the time spent in beating covers where nothing was found as lost or thrown away. But he would decidedly object to tramp with his gun on his shoulder over an arid plain where there was no possibility of any game. And very analogous to this was the business which Stella was engaged in during her second Carnival.

In fact, the real truth is, that unless there is some small corner of the "*carte du tendre*" to be travelled over,—even though that grand main artery through which Stella had been passing be closed to the wayfarer,—Carnival-keeping is apt to become rather heavy work. And such Stella found it.

A little later in the year, however, matters became worse with her. The Austrians came; and the attitude assumed towards them by the Contessa Zenobia has been explained. There were "*soirées dansantes*," and "*matinées dansantes*,"—dancing evenings, and dancing mornings!—at the Palazzo Altamari; but, to the intense disgust and astonishment of her aunt, Stella absolutely refused to dance with the Austrian officers. It was the first time that she had ever been guilty of anything like rebellion or disobedience; and the Contessa Zenobia was almost more astonished than she was angry.

It was the morning after the first of the receptions at which the Austrians had appeared at the Palazzo Altamari, and the Contessa Zenobia, having duly held her "*roovelly*," was sitting in high consultation with the Marchese Florimond in the little private morning-room on the second floor. The one little cup of black coffee, and the morsel of dry bread cut into fingers, which constituted Zenobia's breakfast, had been swallowed. The dainty little *Sèvres* cup and saucer and plate were on their miniature tray of the same beautiful material on an inlaid table by her side; and the lady, though not booted for her day's work as yet, sat with one knee crossed over the other, in a manner that somewhat lavishly displayed one slender shank,—all blood and sinew, my dear!—while she solaced her

roubled mind with the fumes of a cigarette. At the other side of the little table sat the faithful Florimond, in an attitude of profound and commiserating attention. Deep care sat on his brow, and the ambrosial curls of his wig were a little awry. He was tapping with a jaunty cane the tip of one dapper little shiny boot; and the other exquisitely gloved hand was held with the point of the forefinger at the brilliantly white (false) teeth, in a manner that eloquently expressed the gravity of the matter under consideration, and the extreme difficulty he experienced in furnishing the counsel demanded of him.

“*Foi de Biron, Marchese!*” cried Zenobia, fancying that she was making use of a form of asseveration common among the aristocracy of the land of her admiration, “I do not know what to make of it. I am at the end of my Latin! If she had said that the Colonel was bald, and the Major was corpulent,—why, girls will be girls, and one must make the best of it. But what was there to say against Captain Von Stoggendorf, I should like to know? He is an Austrian! She does not choose to dance with the enemies of her country! *A-t-on jamais! Grand Dieu!*”

“It is vain to conceal from ourselves, dear Countess, that the incident is a grave one in many points of view. As for La Signorina Stella, when

I reflect on the example of elegant manners and *savoir vivre* which she has before her eyes, I confess that I am amazed !”

“Ah, Marchese ! It is not to be hoped that a raw girl should possess your delicately just appreciation ! But I should have thought, I confess, that my niece would have done me more credit. Enemies of her country, *parbleu !*”

“It is shocking to think that young girls should get such ideas into their heads ! It used not to be so !” said the sympathising Florimond, with a deep sigh.

“What business has a chit like that to know anything about a ‘country’ indeed ! In my day, we used to say in the immortal words of Piron, that Chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche*, ‘*Où la gloire, le vin, l’amour se trouvent, c’est la patrie du Français !*’ I have no patience with her talk about her country.”

“No, indeed !” cried the courtly Marchese ; “but what is to be done ? It would be extremely undesirable that it should be said that the officers of the protecting army have been invited to your house to be insulted by your adopted daughter !—singularly undesirable !”

“It is out of the question, Marchese ! out of the question ! How could I expect one of them to come to my *roovellies* ? And there is nothing

that makes such a figure in a *roovelly* as an uniform!"

"Had you not better send for the young lady, dear Countess? Perhaps we may induce her to hear reason; and for last night it will be easy to find some excuse."

"Oh! as to hearing reason, if she won't hear that, she shall hear something else! Ring the bell, Marchese! I shall be glad to settle this business while you are here."

So Stella was summoned to her aunt's presence, perfectly conscious of her misdemeanour, and aware of the storm that was about to break over her head.

"Perhaps you had better speak to her, Marchese, in the first instance. Here she comes!" said Zenobia, as Stella entered the room.

The Marchese started up, and having performed a most courtly salutation in unexceptionable style, handed the young lady to a seat; and then took up a position on his feet between the two ladies, poising himself carefully in his lackered boots, arranging his collar, and finally drawing out his snuff-box, preparatory to commencing his exhortation.

"Signorina," he began, "the most illustrious lady, the Countess, your aunt, confiding in my known and—and I think I may say, tried attachment to this family, has requested me to speak

to you on a subject of great, and indeed, I may perhaps be allowed to say, vital—yes, I certainly *may* say, vital importance. Am I fortunate enough, Signorina, to carry with me your indulgent attention?”

Here the Marchese took a pinch of snuff, and Stella gravely bowed. The Marchese bowed elaborately in return, and proceeded :

“A long, and, I may be permitted to say, intimate acquaintance with courts, and—and—and the hidden springs of human conduct, have convinced me, Signorina, that—that—that it is necessary, and indeed, I surely *may* say, expedient—ay, Signorina, expedient—for every gentleman, and, permit me, Signorina, to add, for every lady—(here the Marchese paused and transfixed Stella with a firm though mild glance of parental authority, as feeling that he was making a very palpable hit, he repeated, raising himself on his toes)—ay! for every lady, to do that which is imposed on him—or her, yes, my dear young lady, or her—by the duties of the position, or—or—or shall I say, circumstances—yes, I certainly may be allowed to say circumstances, in which he—or she, or she, Signorina—has been placed by Providence, and—and—and the venerated will of our beloved sovereign.”

Here the Marchese Florimond, having by dint

of intense exertion thus reached the haven of a full stop, seemed inclined to rest awhile upon his oars. But, being stimulated by a sharp "*Allez donc, Marchese?*" from Zenobia, as she impatiently uncrossed and recrossed her knees, giving the knee which had been undermost a turn of the upper place, he resumed :

"A longer, and—and—perhaps I may say *wider*—yes, a *wider* acquaintance with the world, Signorina, will teach you, if the lesson has never been brought home to your mind in your convent, that nothing is more becoming to young persons than to act decorously on all occasions. It is a rule, I may truly say a golden rule, my dear young lady, which you will find of safe application in every conjuncture of life ; and taking into consideration what we owe to our fellow-creatures——"

"Specially such a creature as Von Stoggen-dorf !" interrupted Zenobia, who was impatient to bring the theoretic wisdom of her friend to a practical application.

"Ay! indeed," said the Marchese, somewhat disconcerted, but far too well drilled not to follow the lead given him, "when we consider, as I was saying, that Captain Von Stoggen-dorf is—ahem—a fellow-creature, I may say——"

"*Parbleu !* I should think so ! with such a love of a moustache ! and six feet high without his

boots, if he is an inch. *Per Bacco!* I don't know what the world is coming to, or what the girls want, for my part!"

"It is not the size, but the colour of him, that I object to, aunt!" said Stella, with a laugh in her eye, though she contrived to force her pretty mouth to a due demureness of expression.

"The colour of him, child!" screamed her aunt; "why, what would the girl have? I never saw a finer complexion in my life! I swear there is colour enough in his cheeks——"

"But I did not look so high as his face, aunt. It was the complexion of his coat that I did not like!"

"Hush! my dear young lady, hush—h—!" cried the Marchese, extending his right palm in attitude of alarm and deprecation. "You are treading upon dangerous ground!—invading, I may say, and, indeed—a—a—trespassing on, yes, trespassing on the sacred prerogative of Princes!"

"But, Signor Marchese," said Stella, "I don't want to say a word against the Emperor of Austria's *biancheria*, if he would only keep it at home."

The Marchese Florimond made one hasty step towards the door, as if to assure himself that it was fast closed, then glanced at the window, and finally stepped close up to Stella's chair, and holding both his extended palms, which vibrated with a

little tremulous movement, over her head in a manner eloquently expressive of his sense of the necessity of morally extinguishing this dangerous outburst of flame.

“For Heaven’s sake, Signorina !” he cried—“for the sake of your aunt and of all of us, I implore you to reflect on what you are saying. This is a very delicate subject—a very delicate, an immensely important, and—and—perhaps I may be allowed to express my meaning by saying, a very ticklish subject. It cannot be unknown to you that the military force which his august and sacred Majesty the Emperor (and the Marchese, as the words passed his lips, dropped his eyes to the ground, and slightly bent his chamberlain’s spine, with an expression singularly like that of a whipped hound) has graciously permitted to reside here for the present, was the means of restoring to us the person of our own beloved sovereign, and—and—the reign of order—and—and etiquette, I will say. Surely, my dear young lady, you have lost sight of this !”

“She has lost sight of her senses, I think !” exclaimed her aunt ; “the brave fellows ! They are *les restaurateurs de la patrie* ! There was not a ball worth going to before they came ! And shall the house of Altamari fail in its gratitude to the restorers of the monarchy ! Waltzing, too, like

angels as they do! *Mortbleu!* In my day the smiles of Venus were thought the due reward for the valour of Mars. But you seem to have forgotten your pathology, miss! But they shall not be insulted in this house, *ces braves restaurateurs!* And I insist, Stella, that you consider yourself only too happy to dance with any of them who may do you the honour of asking you. Let me hear no more of this nonsense! And now go to your room, and tell Zélie to assist you in seeing that all your things are ready for this evening! *En avant! Marche!*"

"So! that's settled!" said Zenobia, as Stella quitted the room without further resistance; "but I'll tell you what, *caro mio*," she continued, addressing her faithful counsellor, "it strikes me that these same notions that the girl has got in her head somehow, may give us trouble in a more important matter."

"And let me tell you, *cara*, that the matter we have been talking about is important enough in these days. This question of receiving or not receiving our brave allies is dividing society in a marked manner."

"Well! we've put all that right! But I'm thinking about this proposed match. From all that the Canonico* says, it is one to be secured at all

* The Canonico Adalberto Altamari was the younger brother of the late husband of the Contessa Zenobia.

hazards. He did not tell me a word about it before starting; but I fancy that his journey to Fermo was undertaken solely for the purpose of arranging the affair. It seems that there has been some connexion between the Altamari and Malatesta families before."

"Yes! I remember that the late Conte used to keep up a correspondence with the Fermo Malatestas. And you may trust the Canonico for not losing sight of a good thing of the sort."

"The present Marchese Cesare has but one child it seems, the Marchesino Alfonso; and the property is very large!"

"A good deal of money, too, came into the family from the Cardinal, the present Marchese's uncle."

"Well! The Canonico seems to say that the matter is as good as arranged. The young man is to be here very shortly."

"So the Canonico has told me! I hear from him, too, that the Marchesino Alfonso has been very strictly brought up, and is a perfectly *rangé* young man."

Zenobia shrugged her shoulders, protruded her lips, and gave a little kick out with the small foot at the end of one of the slender shanks—all blood and sinew, my dear!—in a manner which seemed to indicate an imperfect appreciation of the quality

of *rangé*-ness in a young man. But she only said:

“It would be very provoking if anything were to interfere with a scheme so desirable in every way.”

“What should interfere with it?” asked the Marchese.

“Why! this outbreak of Stella’s has set me thinking that it is on the cards that she may give us trouble. But of course there are ways of bringing a girl to reason.”

“But I am inclined to think that Stella is too sensible a girl to make any difficulty in such a case. It is a singular coincidence,” added the Marchese, after a little pause, “that we should have made acquaintance last year with the Marchesino Alfonso’s half-brother, an illegitimate son of the Marchese, born before his marriage—that young man whom my nephew brought here, you remember!”

“To be sure I do! a very handsome young fellow! So he was a son of the Marchese Cesare, was he? I remember that Carlo explained to me that he was an illegitimate son; so his running about the house could have no consequences, you know; and he danced charmingly. I wish that the Marchesino may be as good-looking a fellow! Is the other recognised by the family?”

“He was recognised, and brought up mainly, I believe, under the care of the Cardinal. But he has never been permitted to come in contact with the family. And no secret is made of his position. When is the Marchesino Alfonso to be here?”

“I believe the Canonico expects him every day. All the preliminaries——”

Zenobia was interrupted at this point by the sudden entrance of Zélie, in a great state of agitation.

“Oh! Madame la Comtesse! such an accident! such a misfortune. It was not my fault!”

“*Che diavolo!* what is the matter? What has happened?” inquired the Contessa, with that philosophic coolness which some people are able to maintain under all circumstances that do not manifestly threaten the safety of their own persons.

“Mademoiselle Stella! It was her own fault. I was looking another way at the moment. It was done in an instant!”

“But what was done, Mademoiselle Zélie?” asked the Marchese; “you forget that you have told us nothing.”

“It was the water, Signor Marchese!—the hot water! Mademoiselle Stella sent her maid to the kitchen for a jug of hot water! I was looking into the wardrobe when the girl came into the room with it. ‘Thank you, Assunta, that will do!’

you may go!’ said Mademoiselle; and the next instant I heard a horrible shriek! I ran to her! but I could do no good—no good to her poor foot. The jug had slipped out of her hand, and all the scalding water had gone over her foot and ankle!”

“What clumsiness to be sure!” exclaimed the Contessa. “Go back, Zélie, and request the Signorina Stella to come here.”

“Come here! Madame la Comtesse! You do not know, then, what hot water, scalding water, is. She cannot put her foot to the ground! Heaven knows when she will walk again. It is a surgeon that is wanted, Madame; and that without loss of time!”

“Heavens and earth! what a piece of work! Will you send one of the men, Marchese, for Doctor Contini? I must go and see what the silly girl has done to herself.”

The sight of the excruciating pain Stella was suffering shocked poor Zenobia out of her philosophy at once. She had had no idea of the seriousness of the injury inflicted; and, to do her justice, was not indifferent to her niece’s sufferings as soon as she comprehended the gravity of them.

Doctor Contini at once declared that Stella must go to bed, and probably remain there for several days. And as for using her foot, it would be out of the question for a long time.

In a few days, however, she was able to sit up in

bed, and was allowed, at her urgent request, to have the use of pen and ink. The result was a rather remarkably fat letter, addressed to the Signorina Teresa Palmieri, at the convent of San Procolo at Pistoia.

“DEAREST TERESA,”—said a half-sheet of paper, carefully wrapped round an enclosure so as to prevent the address on it from being seen through the outer cover,—“I am laid up with a scalded foot. Some day I will tell you all about it, and make you laugh. Please let the enclosed be forwarded to your mother without any delay.

“Your always affectionate

“STELLA.”

The enclosure, which was addressed to “La Signora Palmieri, presso la Porta Romana, Firenze,” was found, however, when opened by the widow, to contain only another enclosure, and these words:

“DEAR SIGNORA PALMIERI,—

“Will you give the enclosed to your daughter-in-law, Francesca. I am laid up with a scalded foot. It will soon be well; but, in the mean time, I am not able to send my letters as usual to dear Francesca.

“Yours always, dearest Signora Palmieri,

“STELLA ALTAMARI.”

On the letter, which thus, at length, reached the hands of Francesca, who had some three or four months ago become the wife of Rinaldo, and was now living with her husband in his mother's house, was written only the words :

“To be forwarded as usual !”

Inside the letter, which *was* forwarded as usual by Francesca to Signor Giulio Malatesta, Capitano *nel —^{to} Reggimento dei Lancieri*, a Torino, ran as follows :

“Never was comfort better timed, dearest Giulio, than that which your last week's dear letter conveyed to me. It came when I most wanted comforting. I had grown so angry with my surroundings, so pettish, despondent, gloomy—yes, I protest I am very often now positively *gloomy*, however strange you may think it—that nothing less than your dear handwriting could hearten me up again ! I know it must be hard for you, who have been fighting through that terrible campaign, and are fresh from its glorious sufferings, to believe that my life can be made as weary as it is by a daily and hourly succession of petty troubles, little venomous pin-scratches, that fret me into bad temper. Yet so it is, and has been for the last month !—indeed, ever since those vile white-coated Austrian troops came tramping through our streets—those

horrid *Kaiserlicchi*,* as the people call them, whose stolid flat faces I can never look upon without a shudder—for oh! can I ever help thinking of that fearful battle at the mill of Curtatone, which might have cost me all I have, or care to have, on earth! I have told you, I think, in a former letter, that Aunt Zenobia's liberalism has been fading out sadly of late. The arrival of these Austrians seems to have washed away the very last tinge of it. She immediately began to see the absolute necessity of these defenders of the restoration, *ces brave restaurateurs*, as she calls them; and as she lost no time in finding out, as she says, what *distinky* young men they are, their abominable swords come clanking up our staircase at all hours; whereupon I take care to make myself invisible, and have my daily dose of scolding every afternoon when we return from the *passeggiata* for being absorbed in studying the colouring of the mountains when they come bowing at the carriage door. She positively insisted on my dancing with her new favourites; but—your poor little Stella has been lame these many days past with a pretty severe scald on her left instep, which, silly girl! she had the awkwardness to inflict on herself a few mi-

* The Florentines caught and appropriated this strange word from the constantly recurring epithet, "Königlich Kaiserlich," applied to everything pertaining to Austrian royalty.

nutes after her aunt's intimation to that effect. So I have been spared that mortification at the cost of a few days' confinement to my bed, whence I am now writing. You would have laughed enough for a month if you could have heard the good old Marchese's lecture to me on the sin, the abomination, and, might I be permitted to say, the—the impropriety—yes, the impropriety of my refusing to dance with a certain Captain Von Stogendorf, who is condescending enough to persecute me with his attentions. Aunt Zenobia set him on to lecture me ; and then, when poor Florimond was doing his very best to be effective and impressive, she became so impatient at his somewhat redundant style of oratory, that it was a greater punishment to her than to me to listen to him. I could hardly prevent the hearty laugh which I was enjoying in my sleeve from appearing on my face. Aunt cut it short by peremptorily insisting on my dancing with any of the white-coats who might ask me. And a few minutes afterwards I was doing anything but laughing, I assure you ! for the pang of the scald was greater than I had bargained for. But my escape was well worth it. The absence of our good friend Carlo is a loss to me. I should be able to make a better fight against all these little annoyances if he were here. But he left Florence for Pisa as soon as ever the Carnival was over.

What about your projected journey to Bologna? Have you not been able to get leave of absence yet?

“Write as usual, dearest. Our good Francesca will find some safe means of bringing your letter into my hands. What should we do without her?

“*Addio*, my own love! I want you to tell me that you approve of my little *ruse* as a means of escape from Von Stoggendorf and Company.

“Your ever loving

“STELLA.”

CHAPTER II.

THE CANON ADALBERTO.

THE days passed wearily enough for Stella in the Palazzo Altamari. Every week brought her a letter from Giulio; and she made and kept a stern resolution that she would read the last received only once every day till the arrival of the next. It was not that she imagined that it was possible, as the phrase goes, to have too much of a good thing; but that each week's supply might not be too entirely used up before the coming of the next. A certain freshness still hung about the lines read only seven times, which might not have survived a freer and less restrained use of them. It was only the last letter, however, that was subject to this restriction. As soon as its successor had arrived, it was consigned to the precious and jealously-closed recep-

tacle where all its predecessors were hoarded, to be brought out and passed in general review as often as circumstances would permit. And such opportunities could rarely be found, save by taking advantage of the now early morning light. For Zélie's habit was to take away with her the lamp, after having presided over her young mistress's night toilette. And it was a matter of very grave doubt with Stella what might be the result if Zélie were made aware that she was in the habit of clandestinely receiving letters. She would hardly, Stella thought, betray the past fact to her aunt; but she might very probably think it her duty to take measures for the effectual prevention of a repetition of it. In any case it was prudent to guard the secret of those sacred writings.

Every morning at seven Stella's maid came punctually to her bedside, and not very long afterwards Zélie used to make her appearance there. But before seven A.M. there were, at that season, several hours of light, and during those Stella was perfectly safe from interruption. These, therefore, were the hours selected for the study of the increasing mass of her treasures. Sure as the morning sunlight came at five o'clock—and Stella never overslept the hour by any chance—if any profane eye could have penetrated the roof of the Palazzo Altamari, and sent its curious glance (Heaven

forfend!) into a certain large chamber on the second floor, a fairy-like little figure might have been seen, after a startled look at the little watch on the table by her bedside, to see that the precious two hours yet remained to her, to spring like a hare from her form, and to trip, with the little white bare feet, so delicately inlaid with lapis-lazuli threads of veins, across the wide floor to the large window looking on the Via Larga. The opening of one of the tall shutters gave enough of that bright pure light for Stella's purpose, without the necessity of opening the *persiani* on the outside; so that not even any prying gaze from the opposite side of the street could detect that the occupant of that chamber was astir at an earlier hour than she was supposed to be by the rest of the inhabitants of the Palazzo Altamari. Then the priceless packet was hastily snatched from its place of security, and the small, sylph-like figure, in its light white robe, holding the treasure pressed somewhat closer to the palpitating little bosom than was absolutely needful for the safe transport of it across the room, bounded back to its nest, and proceeded to the undisturbed enjoyment of the two best hours of the day;—undisturbed save by the necessity of consulting the watch from time to time to make sure that before seven o'clock came, and with it the necessity of passing out of

fairylane into the dull routine of mere mortal life, the talisman packet which had power to work that spell was again safely consigned to its repository, the shutter again duly closed, and the lovely little head hypocritically laid once more on its pillow.

I wonder whether bishops, and judges, and prime ministers are able to look back through all the vista of the events and struggles that have made them such with sufficiently unobscured vision to be aware that no "proudest moment of their lives" ever brought with it a joy half so exquisite as that with which they too, *consule Planco*, scanned the delicate writing on some small sheet with a far more concentrated attention than any other combination of human words has since commanded from them! If the events which memory has to traverse be too great, and too numerous, and too solid for it to be possible for those big-wigs to do so,—why then there is another consolation, besides those already registered by the philosophers, for those of mankind who wear the little wigs!

These two morning hours, together with the minutes given to the reading of the epistle for the week, which could be accomplished with less precautions, inasmuch as it consisted but of one, or the most two, sheets, were the only green spots in the very arid desert of Stella's life during those summer months of 1859.

The Contessa Zenobia had settled to pass the month of August at Leghorn, as it had been for some years past more and more becoming the fashion among the *beau monde* of Florence to do. And Stella had looked forward to this month at the sea-side with pleasure, as at least making a change in the monotonous routine of the Palazzo Altamari, and withdrawing her for a while from the persecution of Von Stoggendorf and his brother "restaurateurs." Her foot, too, was now rapidly becoming well, and it seemed probable that, unless a timely diversion was effected in some way, she would be likely enough to encounter the misfortune of a sprained ankle, or some such disagreeable accident.

A diversion *did*, however, occur before August came, of a quite different kind from any which it had entered into Stella's head to dream of, but of which the reader has gathered some intimation from the latter part of the conversation between the Contessa Zenobia and the Marchese Brancacci, which has been recorded in the last chapter. Troubles of a very different calibre from any that could be occasioned by obnoxious dancing partners were about to break over the head of the poor little heiress—troubles of the sort that heiresses are specially liable to!

The Contessa Zenobia, as has been seen, was

not altogether without misgivings as to the degree of difficulty she might have in carrying out her design, though she was very far from having any suspicion of the real obstacles that she was destined to find in her path. She had not the slightest idea that she should be finally baffled. Girls in the position of Stella Altamari, of course, had to make the matches arranged for them by their families; and, of course, Stella would do so with more or less of difficulty and resistance. She had, however, a sort of instinctive feeling that her niece might be difficult to guide in this matter if it should unfortunately chance that her own fancies should be opposed to the wishes of those placed in authority over her. And now, since the girl's absurd conduct with reference to the Austrian officers, and the still more absurd reasons she had given for it, her aunt feared that notions of the same sort might prejudice her against a marriage with a man whose connexions, sympathies, and antecedents were, as she well knew, markedly anti-national and "*Austrianti*."

Under these circumstances, she deemed it best to say nothing to her niece on the subject till the gentleman himself should arrive, hoping that he would prove to be a man of the sort of those who generally find little difficulty in making a girl of Stella's age feel that the orthodox faith and opi-

nion on all subjects is that which they may happen to hold.

How far these hopes of the Contessa Zenobia were fulfilled by the event cannot, perhaps, better be communicated to the reader than by transcribing a portion of another letter from Stella to Giulio, written about the middle of July, 1859.

“There has been another new comer of late to this house,” she writes, after having described to Giulio some of the annoyances caused her by the presence of the *braves restaurateurs*, “whose appearance has irked me not a little; though in truth I hardly know why it should do so, except that aunt seems so over-civil to him, and so anxious to make me so too. This is no other than your half-brother Alfonso. He is here from Fermo on business, I fancy; and gives us the light of his presence almost every day. Now don’t call me hasty and impulsive in my prejudices and dislikes, my dear tolerant and impartial Giulio; but truly, if I had no better and deeper reasons for my aversion to him than those which every one else can see as well as I, there would be more than enough to justify it.

“The Sor Marchesino is—what shall I say? a very ‘Gingillino’ of a man, as our glorious Giusti has it,—a perfect example of the mincing, finick-

ing, insipid order of coxcomb, with a pink and white pursed-up little face, rather weak eyes, and hateful Austrian moustachios, hemp-coloured and waxed up into sharp points, after the fashion which aunt *will* call the *beau cirage Autrichien* ! A perking, strutting, little figure, invisible feet, and cambric ruffles—oh the horror!—at his little wrists. In short, a perfect Gingillino, with a Marquisate tacked on to him, which I think makes him ten times worse. Then his lordship's talk is as Gingillinesque as his person. Whenever he is not wondering (which seems to me to be the normal condition of whatever mind he possesses), and confesses to having any opinion at all on matters political or social, he lets drop little sapless, colourless chips of propriety, about as like real ideas as a tight curled wood shaving is like a living growing ringlet of hair. He has got little pet speeches about "order," and "legitimate authority," and the "*Santo Padre*" and "his sufferings," which come out as firmly cut and dried as the phrases of a bird-organ, and make me twist my hands together so tight, that I declare they are black and blue with the squeezing. And worst of all, it is especially to me that these charming speeches are addressed, and—Oh dear, there is Zélie—(she is enchanted with him, by the way!)—calling me down stairs, and I must go. If I wait to finish this

letter till I am able to escape again, I shall not be able to send it to our good Francesca to-day, and then it would not reach you on the day on which it is due; a misfortune which, though (to your honour, Signore, be it said) I have never experienced, I can appreciate too keenly to inflict on you.

“*Addio*, my own heart’s treasure! Your loving
“STELLA.”

When Zélie summoned her charge to the presence of the Contessa, as related by Stella at the close of the above letter, the terrible blow, which we know was in preparation for her, was about to fall with all its sudden stunning weight upon her head. The scene which followed between Stella and her aunt was a terrible and very painful one; a detailed report of which would be little edifying. The Contessa Zenobia did not plainly speak out all that was in her mind; but had she done so, the stand-point from which she in reality looked at the question would have been found to explain much of the abominable inuendo which fell—much of it harmlessly—on Stella’s ears. “I am speaking to you,” she might have said, if she had been capable of clearly seeing and expressing all her own theories on the subject, and had been inclined to speak them out truly—“I am speaking to you of settling

your position in life, and you keep answering me with impertinent cross purposes. Love may be a very pleasant thing in its place, and in due season, I am sure I don't deny it; but what on earth has it to do with the matter in hand? Above all, what can excuse the indelicacy of a girl's having any ideas upon such a subject? I am talking to you of marriage. Do pray confine your attention to that. It will be time enough to think about love by-and-by. You tell me that you can never love the Marchese Alfonso. Do I require you to do so? His position is one which makes him in every respect a proper, nay, a highly desirable husband for you. And all your dreams about love and all that are wholly beside the purpose."

The Contessa Zenobia did not say all this. But these were the ideas at the bottom of her mind. And Zenobia, though a more ignorant, and in some respects a coarser-minded woman than the majority of her social peers, was not a much worse woman than they; or, indeed, a much worse woman on the whole, perhaps, than many an other, whose more fortunately circumstanced antecedents would have taught her to listen with just horror and indignation to the enunciation of poor Zenobia's notions. Her ideas on the subject in hand, and the partially veiled declaration of them, which poor Stella had to listen to, conveyed amid a storm of passion and

reproaches, produced a scene, the reproduction of which would be so little pleasing or useful, that a sufficient notion of it may be gathered in the least offensive form from another letter written by Stella on the subsequent day to Giulio. It depicts also very faithfully the effect produced on the writer's mind by the scene she had had to pass through.

“I little thought, my dearest love, when I was obliged to leave off my letter yesterday so abruptly, that I should take up my pen again this morning, and with such a tale to tell you! Last night I was unable to write. Twice this morning I have tried to begin my letter, but the words would not come. Oh! what a blind, foolish, ungrateful girl was I to complain of my yesterday—that dear bright yesterday, which brought no worse trouble with it than could be laughed over in the telling! while now—I will try to be calm, Giulio *mio*, and write sanely; but my head is yet in a whirl of confusion.

“I went down to my aunt when Zélie called me. It was early for her to receive even me; but I could see that she was quite prepared for company, though no one was with her. She was as gay, perhaps a little gayer than usual. She kissed me kindly, and bade me sit down by her bedside and be lectured. And I laughed. Then she told

me that I was growing quite a woman,—that I should soon be turning into an old maid,—and I laughed again. And then—oh Giulio!—she told me I must marry!—I almost laughed still!—that it was her will I should be married soon;—that as my only guardian she had settled the matter, and had, in fact, promised me—Oh, my Giulio!—I see, I see you guess it! I see you know the horror I can hardly write—to that man, the Marchese Alfonso,—that wretched despicable creature! Yet why do I call him so? Would not any other have seemed to me as wretched and despicable as he?—any save one only! What I answered I cannot tell. But I did not shed tears! *That* I know. I must have spoken out all the despair I felt, for my aunt grew fiercely angry—angry as I never dreamed she could be!—and commanded me with threats to confess the cause of my refusal. I was silent at first. It was only in reply to taunts, and sneers, and reproaches, which I cannot repeat to you, that I at last named your dear name! God help me, what could I do! I felt, as I did so, that it would make matters no better; as in fact it did not, but rather worse. On hearing it she fell into a frightful storm of passion, and—oh! the hideous things she said, or rather screamed at me; and frantic nonsense, which frightened me at last, for great part of it I literally did not understand. And so she drove me from the room, and I took

refuge here more dead than alive, and have been too glad not to be called upon to appear since ; for now, weak coward that I am, all the energy is gone out of me, and I can only weep and weep, and call on you for support and comfort.

“Nevertheless, my Giulio, I do not say one word to bid you trust to my strength as far as the ultimate result is concerned. They cannot marry me without an uttered word from my mouth ; and I think my Giulio knows his Stella well enough to feel very sure that the rack has never been invented yet—either physical or moral rack—that can force that word from her ! In life, and in death, my own love, I am yours ! yours wholly, and yours only ! Don’t think I write these words to give you any assurance of the fact. I know that you need no such assurance. Still less do I write them to record any resolution of my own. It is a matter out of my power ; as much so as it is to cancel the past. I could not change it, if I would ! Would I if I could ? Ask your own heart, Giulio, and be quite sure of getting a true answer.

“But do not imagine, for all these fine words, true as they are to the letter, that I am brave. You will fancy, Giulio, that your poor little Stella is coming out quite in a new character, as a heroine. Put any such flattering imagination out of your head, my Giulio. I am the same timid, easily

scared little mouse, whose weakness, I suppose, recommended her to your strength, without the slightest pretension to heroism of any sort ! But I feel as one may fancy poor weak hunted creatures do when they are driven to bay. Zélie's little Italian greyhound was pursued in the street the other day by some big dogs, and the poor little beastie had barely time to reach its mistress, and jumped with one bound into her arms, and lay squeezing itself against her bosom, and shivering and palpitating, as if its poor little heart would burst. Oh ! Giulio, that I could do the like ! If my only strong and safe haven of refuge were near me ! If only I could leap to your neck, and feel your strong arms round me ! As it is, my only safety lies in the thought, which I keep steadily before my mind, that it is impossible to carry into effect my aunt's hideous intention, without my own act ; and that no human power can compel me to that act ! What immediate step will be taken to enforce my compliance I know not ! The Marchese Florimond, Zélie tells me, is now closeted with my aunt ; and no doubt my rebellion is the subject of their consultation. I have always thought the Marchese a harmless, good-natured old man. But I suspect that his opinion, as far as he can be said to have any of his own, would be that a girl is bound in such a case to render implicit obedience to her

parents or guardians. And at all events we know that he would as soon think of putting on his wig wrong side outwards, as of opposing my aunt. You see, Giulio dear, I can laugh a little bit, as of old, yet, in the midst of my trouble. Do not, therefore, be too much out of heart about me. One great trial I am spared. If it was a mother who was commanding me to do this thing—I should equally rebel, but the rebellion would be infinitely more painful. As it is, though I am grateful to Aunt Zenobia for much kindness and much indulgence, neither my heart nor my conscience have any pang to suffer from uncompromising resistance to her will on such a subject.

“After all, what can they do to me? They cannot kill me! As for beating, or starving, or anything of that kind, they will find their match. Little coward as you may think me, Giulio, and as in many things I truly am, I can endure, and not be afraid of, physical pain; witness—but I won’t boast to you of my exploits—not now, at least! There is only one thing I won’t endure. And that is, to be exposed to the personal obsessions of the Marchese Alfonso. I feel that I should become desperate and dangerous under a course of that torture. If the worst comes to the worst in this way, I have a notion that I could frighten the little man; perhaps even to the extent of driving him to

abandon all thoughts of adding the Altamari to the Malatesta property.

“There are ways, too, of making it absolutely necessary to be confined to one’s bed without endangering one’s life! In any case, I am quite determined not to have to listen to professions of the Marchese Alfonso’s love. Ugh!

“And now, my own beloved, once again, do not be cast down or alarmed about your little Stella! I am afraid I have written more dolefully than I ought to have done at the beginning of this long letter. Of course I shall write again, the instant I know my doom. That is to say, I shall *if possible*. And remember, that if you do not hear from me, you are not to suppose anything worse than that I have been so watched as to make it impossible for me to communicate with our good Francesca. It would be a great comfort if Carlo were here. And in all probability he will be, in the course of the autumn.

“*Addio amor mio!* Your own

“STELLA.”

Stella was quite right in supposing that, while she was busy writing the above letter, her aunt was occupied in taking counsel as to the best means of enforcing her submission to the lot which had been determined on for her. It was true, also,

when Zélie had made her report, that Zenobia's only privy counsellor was the Marchese Florimond, who could serve little other purpose than as an echo to the lady's expression of her views and ideas. But a second visitor, of a very different calibre, had been announced before the Contessa and her faithful Florimond had been long together. This was the Canonico Adalberto Altamari. He was a younger brother of the Contessa Zenobia's husband, and of Stella's father; younger by so many years, that he was, at the time of which we are speaking, not more than fifty-five or six years old.

The celibacy of the Romish clergy—an institution devised by a greater perfection of the devilish wisdom of the serpent than perhaps any other which ever entered into the head of man to contrive—completely attains the object it aims at in the vast majority of cases. It effectually secures to the exclusive service of the Church the hearts and heads, the ambition, energy, and self-love of her Levites. It does so most surely in the case of those of the priesthood, who are chosen from all but the upper classes of society. It mostly succeeds in the case of the latter also, when the position offered in the hierarchy is commensurate with the social position of the individual. The cases in which it often fails to do so, are those in

which the connexion with the Church is weak in proportion to the strength of the ties that bind a man of high social position to the world. The old ecclesiastical Electors of Germany were, save in some exceptional instances, due to the idiosyncrasy of the individual, more princes than bishops.

Thus, had the Church given Adalberto Altamari a red hat, she would in all probability have "marked him for her own," heart and brain. Had she given the son of one of the Altamari *fattori* the canonicate held by the Conte Adalberto, the purchase would have been equally complete. But a mere canonicate without prospect of ulterior preferment was not enough to wean so highly-placed a noble from the world. And the interests and ambitions of the Canon Altamari centred accordingly in the family greatness rather than in his own professional career. To unite the two large properties of Malatesta and Altamari into one huge mass of wealth, and to lay the foundation of a family of Altamari-Malatesta, or perhaps even by dint of skilful negotiation, of Malatesta-Altamari, was, in the unhappy absence of male heirs to the Altamari name, an object worth living for.

The Canonico Adalberto was not fond of his sister-in-law Zenobia. He was essentially a gentleman; and she was, as the reader is aware—not calculated to be wholly acceptable to a refined and

gentlemanlike churchman. They saw little of each other therefore ; more especially as Zenobia, having charged herself with the entire education of Stella, and having the whole of her late husband's property at her disposal, the Canonico had small title to interfere in the bringing up of the heiress. He had contented himself, therefore, with ascertaining that the young lady was placed in one of the most accredited educational convents of Tuscany ; and with so far ascertaining the views and feelings of Zenobia on the subject as to assure himself that when the proper time should come, he should meet with no opposition to his plans for the family aggrandizement from her.

And he had, as we know, had every reason to be satisfied with the manner in which she had received the scheme for the Malatesta marriage.

"I am glad you have come, Signor Canonico," said Zenobia, saluting her guest. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish ! The Marchese here and I were considering what was best to be done. Perhaps your wisdom may help us. For my part, I am so flabbergasted that I hardly know whether I stand on my head or my heels !"

"If I can in any way assist you to recover a knowledge of your position in that respect, I shall have much pleasure in doing so," said the Canon, with a courtly churchman's bow, and a sly glance of his eye at the Marchese.

"I assure you the matter in hand is grave enough, Signor Canonico!" said the Marchese.

"*Altro che grave, per Bacco!*" exclaimed the Contessa. "When I informed your niece, yesterday, of the brilliant destiny that had been secured for her, what do you think of the minx flatly declaring that she would hear of nothing of the kind? She talked nails* of the poor Marchese Alfonso! Nothing could come to her tongue bad enough. I don't say that he is a man for a woman to fall in love with. *Tutt' altro!*† But who the devil wants her to fall in love with him?"

"Did you suggest that consideration to the young lady's attention?" asked the priest, somewhat dryly, and looking at the Contessa with a rather peculiar expression as he spoke.

"I believe you!" returned Zenobia, utterly unconscious of the Canonico's meaning; "of course I did! But, bless your heart! it had no more effect in bringing her to reason, than if I had whistled to her."

"You forget, perhaps, that the Contessina Stella has not the advantage of your experience of such matters. I am afraid that you have scarcely taken the best means of leading her in the direction which we wish her inclinations to take. Is her rejection

* "Dire chiodi," to abuse any one; a common and rather vulgar Tuscan expression.

† "Quite the reverse."

of the match proposed to her the extent of the mischief we have to deal with, may I ask?"

"And mischief enough too, is not it? You seem to take it very coolly, Signor Canonico!"

"There does not seem to me, my dear Signora Contessa, any great reason for alarming ourselves. I could hardly anticipate that Stella would jump at the proposal made her. These matters have to be managed with a little skill. But there is rarely any great difficulty in them. There are generally means to be found of inducing young ladies to hear reason. But I ask again, whether Stella's rejection of the Marchese Alfonso, merely on the ground that she does not fancy him, is the whole extent of the evil?"

"I suppose it is. I do not quite understand your meaning, Signor Canonico."

"The important point is this, Signora Contessa. Have you any reason to believe that her refusal arises from her having conceived any other attachment?"

"*Parbleu!* That is just where the shoe pinches!" exclaimed the Contessa. "The impudent hussy had the audacity to tell me to my face that she was in love with a youngster—an *homme de rien*—who was here during the Carnival last year, dancing about at all the balls;—and who, it seems, is, of all persons in the world, the illegitimate half-brother of the Marchese Alfonso!"

"This complicates the matter somewhat, and places it in a different category," said the priest, as his brow darkened a little. "May I ask who and what this '*homme de rien*' is?"

"He is the son of the Marchese Cesare by a woman who, as I have understood, afterwards took the veil," answered the Marchese Florimond; "his name is Giulio Malatesta. He has, I believe, been brought up at the cost and by the charity of the family. My nephew became acquainted with him at Pisa, where he was studying at the University, and unluckily brought him here."

"What sort of a young man is he?" asked the Canon Adalberto.

"Why, a mighty pretty fellow!" answered the Contessa Zenobia, who probably felt that she was a competent witness upon this point; "there is no denying that!—twenty times the man that the Marchese Alfonso is! But, as I said to Stella, what the deuce has that got to do with choosing a husband? When you have got a husband, I said, it is fully time enough to think of such things! But, for my part, I think that all modesty and decorum are leaving the world, *pardi*! Unmarried girls did not talk or think about loving men in my time, *mortbleu*!"

"It is possible, Signora Contessa, that changes may have taken place in the world, in more than one respect, since that time," rejoined the Canonico,

dryly. "I am afraid that there has been mismanagement here. I am to blame myself for not having taken the precaution of giving an eye to what Stella was about since she left her convent. Was it quite prudent, my sister-in-law, to allow this young man, being such as you describe him, to frequent your house in the manner in which you admit that he did?"

"Why, who the devil could have dreamed there could come any harm from it? and he illegitimate! Of course, marriage between him and an Altamari was out of the question; and who could have supposed that things were come to such a pass in the world, that a young girl like Stella should be thinking of men before she was married!"

"Well!" said the Canonico, who saw that nothing was to be gained by outraging Zenobia's sense of propriety and maidenly modesty by any further observations on this part of the subject, "it is useless to lament over the past. We must turn our attention to the future. Perhaps no very fatal mischief has been done. In the first place, what is the present social position of this obnoxious illegitimate son?"

"He *was* a student at Pisa, as I said," replied the Marchese Florimond; "but he was one of those who were engaged in that absurd affair at Curtatone; and he is now, I believe, a captain in the Piedmontese service."

The priest's face grew blacker as the Marchese spoke. "It is singular," he said, with a sort of quiet but concentrated bitterness, "how constantly recurring in every walk of life are the occasions on which one is met by the annoyances and social dislocations arising from the apostasy of a crowned head from the interests and duties of his order, and the unnatural coalition between authority and the revolutionary principle! Here, again, as at every turn, this renegade monarchy stands in one's way! There would have been small difficulty in those good old times, of which the Signora Contessa was speaking just now, in disembarassing ourselves of the presence of this young man; or, indeed, now, if that odious and unnatural Piedmont were not in the way. As it is, we must act without any such assistance. We have brought troubles upon ourselves, but not failure, by suffering the girl to become acquainted with this man. The question now is, what will be the best immediate steps to take?"

"Bread and water, and confinement to her own room, till she thinks better of it, I say!" cried the Contessa. "Lord bless you! there is no use in talking to her!"

"Nevertheless, Signora Contessa, if you will forgive me for differing from you in some degree, I am inclined to think that the discipline you mention would not be the best calculated to attain

the aim we have in view. Where a change of heart is needed," continued the Canon, with a slight alteration of tone and manner, indicating that he was now speaking professionally, "spiritual means must be adopted. I should be disposed to recommend an attempt to bring the holy influences of religion to bear upon her mind!"

"Well!" said Zenobia, with a slight shrug, but with that sort of yielding deference with which one gives up one's medical notions to the authoritative dictum of a professional practitioner, "I am sure, if you think, Signor Canonico, that there is any good to be done by confession, and penance, and sacraments, and all that, I say, try them all. I am sure she deserves it!"

"The plan I would recommend," pursued the priest, "would include the due use of these and all other holy influences of the Church, applied, however, in the congenial atmosphere of a retirement, which should give her leisure to meditate on the wholesome counsel given her—and on the consequences of the obstinate rejection of it."

"Shut her up in a convent! Send her back to her school-books! That's the plan! You've hit it, Canon! I've no doubt it will bring her round in double quick!" cried Zenobia. "Bravo, Signor Canonico!"

"I would not, I think, however, recommend

sending her back to her convent at Pistoia. She would renew old friendships there, which would interfere with the isolation of heart which we require to produce; and, possibly, even would be subjected to undesirable influences. No! my notion would be to send her elsewhere."

"Anywhere you like! But I do not understand what the whereabouts can have to do with it."

"It is not exactly for the sake of the locality that I should name the retreat that I have in my eye. Though the geographical position of the place would not be altogether without its advantages," returned the Canon.

"Ah!" said the Contessa, with a shrug, and an intensely Italian depreciatory grimace, "*per me poi a questa geografia non ci credo gran cosa!*"* evidently considering geography as a new-fangled sort of science to be classed with craniology, and such like.

"It is an unimportant feature in the plan I would propose," replied the priest, with a bland smile and a courteous bow, as admitting the reasonableness of the lady's scepticism. "I would suggest that the young lady be placed for a while in a convent of Ursulines at Montepulciano. The

* "For my part, I do not put any great faith in this geography." The words have been given in Italian, because they are reported word for word as they fell from her ladyship's lips.

Lady Superior is a very excellent and able woman, whom I know well, and in whom I can place perfect confidence. With regard to the situation of the place, I only meant that, being a small and remote little town, distant from any of the great lines of communication, there is the greater chance that her residence there may remain unknown to those who might endeavour to counteract our intentions."

"Very well! Montepulciano be it! I am sure I have nothing better to propose," said Zenobia.

"The rule of the order," continued the Canonico Adalberto, "is a somewhat strict one. But I do not wish that it should be so applied to the Contessina Stella as to cause her any bodily suffering. It is to the effect on her mind and heart, which I hope, and, indeed, do not doubt, that my good and pious friend, the Abbess of Santa Filomena, will be able to produce, that I trust. The religious discipline of the house is peculiarly well calculated, I think, to dispose a rebelliously-inclined spirit to the blessed virtue of obedience."

"A blessed virtue, indeed!" sighed the Marchese Florimond; "and a very useful house that convent of Ursulines must be in these times, Signor Canonico! When would you propose that the Signorina Stella should commence her residence with those holy ladies?"

"It will be desirable that I should see the Abbess in person," replied the Canonico. "But there need be no delay beyond what is necessary for that purpose. I can proceed to Montepulciano at once. And on my return, say in five days from this, the Contessina might be ready to start on her journey."

The result of this council of war was communicated to Giulio by the subject of it in the following letter, written on the succeeding day :

"I have barely the time, my own, to write the letter you must be so eagerly anxious for. My fate, or at least the next phase of it, is settled ; *and it might be much worse !* There was a grand consultation here yesterday on my case. The Canonico Adalberto, my uncle, who has been the projector of this hateful and impossible marriage scheme, came, and was closeted for a long time with Aunt Zenobia and the Marchese Florimond. And last night it was communicated to me by my aunt in a dry, hard, brief manner, very unlike her usual rattling talkativeness, that I am to be sent to a convent, there to meditate on the virtues and necessity of obedience. I say again, my own, it might be worse. I shall not be exposed to the torment of listening to, or even of seeing, the Marchese Alfonso. The worst of it is, that the utmost secrecy

is observed with reference to the place of my destination ; of course with the view of preventing me from communicating it to you. And if I am to remain without any tidings from you—without my accustomed tonic and cordial, in the shape of the renewed assurances of your love—I shall wither away ! I feel that I shall. But courage, my own love ! I think, I trust that we shall beat them even in this, too. I have managed to write to Francesca ; have told her all ; and implored her to get her husband to be on the look-out, and to ascertain whither I am conveyed. Fortunately, I was able to tell her the day and hour of our departure from Florence, which has been fixed for 7 A.M. on next Saturday. And my trust is that Signor Rinaldo will stick to the traces of me, till he has ascertained the place of my imprisonment.

“ Write then, my own love, as usual, under cover to Francesca, and trust to her finding the means of forwarding your letter. Do not be out of heart, my own beloved ! Courage and patience, my Giulio, and the future will be ours.

“ Adieu, dearest ! I hope to find the means of forwarding my letters in future. But remember, in case I should fail to do so ;—remember, and let no length of silence cause you to forget or to doubt, that I am, and shall ever be unalterably and wholly your own Stella. *Addio amor mio !*”

CHAPTER III.

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES.

THE differences between the social life of Europe in these latter times, and that which prevailed during all the previous centuries of which history has the record, may be summed up in no way perhaps more compendiously and accurately, than by stating that during the latter period accessibility, and during the former inaccessibility, was the chief merit any spot could offer as an eligible site for human dwellings. The site of Montepulciano was selected by its old Etruscan founders for the advantages it presented in the latter point of view. And it pays the penalty of its old-world peculiarities in this respect, by incurring that reputation for being remote and out of the world, which the Canonico Adalberto had attributed to

it. The modern streams of communication and commerce run by in the plain below; and the old town on its hill-top looks dreamily down on the busy life in which it declines to take any very active share.

Yet in this matter of situation, as in so many other things—in *every* other thing, perhaps, I should say—there is much of compensation. It is a magnificent position. The world has recently been brought within sight of it by the railroad running from Siena Rome-wards. But when Stella Altamari was condemned to seclusion within its old grey walls, Montepulciano was yet farther away from the haunts and track of travellers. And now it is only "*guarda e passa*," which famous Dantescan words might almost be adopted for the world's motto in these railroad days. For the world, more and more in a hurry every day, as if it really believed in the Cumming Millennium, dashing by on its iron road, is far away among what were distant foreign nations, in the days when Montepulciano rebuilt her walls, destroyed by hostile Siena, long before the yoke of huge, mild-eyed, dove-coloured oxen could have dragged a traveller up from the level of the plain to the site of the old Etruscan city.

Yet it is well worth while to make the long ascent. The clean, well-built little stone city pos-

sesses no hotel, properly so called ; but kindly Christians may be found on inquiry, who are willing, for a moderate consideration, to play the Samaritan to a stranger. And then from the vantage-ground of the city wall, now barely serving to keep out clandestine chicken and flasks of wine bent on escaping the octroi duty, though once sufficing to hold at bay all the chivalry of Siena—for Siena in the old fighting days was always playing terrier to plucky little Montepulciano's presentation of the part of rat—from that often destroyed, often rebuilt wall, I say, he who has scaled it, may feast his eye on a varied panorama rich in all the special beauty of Italian landscape. Southward, close beneath the hill on whose top the city stands, is the little lake, so poetically and picturesquely called the "Chiaro"* of Montepulciano, a placid mirror in a frame of oak woods, with the celebrated Etruscan site of Chiusi on its farther shore. And farther, in the same direction, is the more magnificent Thrasymene, with its dazzlingly green islands and bordering lowlands, and the stern and grave old cities of Cortona and Perugia, looking down, as they have looked for some three thousand years, on the lovely mingling of wood and water beneath them. Exquisitely beautiful is the view from Montepulciano in this direction.

* "The clear."

To the northward and eastward is the rougher and less smiling prospect of the Apennine, less abounding in varied objects, but scarcely less rich in diversified effects of light and shade, when the rays of the rising or setting sun are playing at hide-and-seek with the shadows among the folds and hollows of the mountain flanks.

But what the Montepulcianesi most pride themselves on in the way of prospect, and most exultingly point out to the notice of a stranger, is a certain spot of their city from which the Mediterranean would be visible to the westward, were it not, as they declare, for the shoulder of one ill-mannered hill, which jealously interposes itself between them and the seaboard.

The convent of Santa Filomena is built close to the southern wall of the city, in such sort as to command from its windows the full prospect of the magnificent landscape in that direction. But though the convent may be, in loose language, said to "command" that view, the inmates of it, with the exception of the Lady Abbess, do nothing of the sort. For, with a perversity of refusal to take the goods the gods provide them—the goods so strikingly the gift of an all-bountiful Creator, that the levity of the heathen phrase jars the sense—the votaries of St. Ursula have carefully shut out the view from all the windows of their convent except

those of the Abbess's apartment. The hideous contrivance for effecting this will be familiar to all who have travelled in any Roman Catholic country. A sort of trough of wood or stone, with its side sloping outwards, is placed across the lower part of the window, so that the inhabitants of the room palely lighted by it can see a strip of sky, if they turn their eyes in the only direction in which, according to the theory of their vocation, they ought to turn them, but can catch no glimpse of the sublunary world.

The parlour of the Abbess was excepted from this rule at the convent of the Ursulines, and the whole of that lovely expanse which has been described could be enjoyed from the windows of it.

The other side of the convent stood in a narrow, most melancholy-looking lane, the lofty stone buildings of which prevented any ray of sunshine from entering it save for a short period at mid-day. There were very few windows in the huge black wall of the convent on this side, and those few were protected in the manner that has been described. A small door under a round-topped arch, above which was a half-obliterated fresco, representing some one of the miraculous doings of St. Ursula, opening on this lane, was the only entrance to the convent, save a postern in the lofty garden wall, always, of course, rigidly guarded by lock and bolt.

And the smallness of the massive, strong-looking little door in the wide extent of unbroken wall, gave a peculiarly prison-like air to the front of the convent of Santa Filomena.

The Canonico Adalberto Altamari, though he had already undergone the fatigue of one journey from Florence to Montepulciano on his niece's behalf, in execution of the plan of operation decided on at the conference between him and the Contessa Zenobia, deemed it his duty, as a good uncle, to set forth again immediately on his return for the purpose of himself escorting Stella on her journey. There was, as may be imagined, little conversation between the uncle and niece by the way, although they had to themselves all the *coupe* of the little diligence, which, by God's help, as the programme of our own old stage-coaches used to say, reached Montepulciano on the evening of the second day of its journey from Florence. Not that the Canonico was stern or harsh, or, indeed, anything but perfectly courteous and even kind in his manner to his niece. But, without any direct lecturing or threats, he contrived, while insinuating his perfect confidence that a short period of reflection would lead her to see the propriety and expediency of acceding to the wishes of her family, to give her very clearly to understand that should that not prove to be the case, the doors which she

was about to enter would not open for her again till she was prepared to do so ; and, furthermore, that if such compliance were unhappily delayed until it might be too late to carry out the intentions that had been formed for her, the doors in question would, in all human probability, never open for her more.

So Stella, though she, too, on her part, was very gentle and silent, understood that it was war to the knife between her uncle and herself.

When all the means and apparatus possessed and skilfully used in such places as that to which Stella was being carried for breaking down the heart and will of a human being, by "bringing spiritual influences to bear upon them," as the Canonico unctuously phrased it, are borne in mind—when the real amount of power wielded by her family is remembered—and further allowance is made for the inexperience of a young girl to whom this power appeared still more irresistible than it was, and a grave-like imprisonment for life in a convent seemed a doom yet more easily inflicted than it really was—it will be admitted that the hearing that little round-topped door in the huge dead wall slam behind her with an echo through the corridor on which it opened, was likely to be trying enough to the courage of a girl in Stella's position.

Stella, however, though she was far from under-rating the difficulties and troubles before her, by no means lost heart. She said to herself, as she passed within the convent gate, that this was to be her Curtatone, and she determined to fight the battle that was before her to the last without flinching and without a thought of surrender—to fight it with a valour that should deserve the approbation of Giulio!

Stella Altamari carried as brave a heart in that dainty sylph-like figure of hers, as many a hero has carried beneath coat of mail or gold-laced cloth—a braver heart than those, perhaps, will give her credit for, who know nothing of the “spiritual influences” brought to bear on recalcitrant spirits in convents; or of the extent of paternal authority under the *régime* of a paternal government.

It must be admitted that one great source of hope and comfort had been vouchsafed to her during the journey, and had materially contributed to keep up her courage. She and her uncle, as has been said, occupied the *coupe* of the diligence. On the roof it was a cabriolet, after the French fashion. And when the carriage began to climb the first steep hill after leaving Florence, from this cabriolet descended a young man, who, stepping out briskly, soon passed it, and walked up the hill in front of the *coupe* windows. At

first Stella did not observe the walker, but before the top of the hill was reached she was certain it was Rinaldo ; and when he proceeded to climb up to his place again, she was able to exchange one cautiously-guarded glance with him, which satisfactorily assured her that her hurried note to Francesca had been duly acted on by her kind friends. Of course, no sort of communication, not even a look, could be ventured on during the journey ; but when the diligence was painfully toiling up the hill of Montepulciano on the evening of the second day, a little after sunset, Rinaldo was again stepping along in advance of it ; and the last thing which Stella saw before she entered the door of her prison in the now dark lane, was the same figure cautiously watching her from under the deep shadow of the wall opposite. She carried with her, therefore, into her prison the great comfort of knowing that Giulio and her other friends would at least be informed of her whereabouts.

Her uncle simply presented her to the Lady Superior, and at once took his departure. All that had to be said between them had been said at their previous meeting.

The Lady Superior of the Ursuline convent of Santa Filomena at Montepulciano was, as the Canonico Adalberto had said, a person eminently

well qualified for undertaking the work to be done in reducing a rebellious spirit to obedience. She was seventy years of age at the time of Stella's arrival at the convent, and had spent the last twenty of them in forcing upon those placed under her authority, as Superior of the community, that moral suicide which, for more than thirty previous years, she had been learning to practise. She was not a bad woman; or, rather, she would not have been such if the spirit of monasticism had not desiccated her heart and warped her intellect. As it was, no human feeling, no capacity for human passion, either good or bad, was left in her. To become "*utpote cadaver*," even as a corpse, is the celebrated formula expressing the Jesuits' *beau ideal* of monastic perfection. And the Mother Veronica, having attained this perfection herself, existed only for the enforcement of it on those under her authority. She understood that palpable tyranny and violent exertion of despotic authority are likely, by exciting an energy of resistance, to keep the volition alive; and she judiciously trusted to the benumbing effects of a carefully-created void, and a leaden system of quiet but never-relaxing repression, for the gradual destruction of it.

Before the end of the year, Stella, despite her brave heart, began to feel the deadly effects of

this moral malaria telling upon her in a manner of which she could hardly render to herself a clear account. It seemed as if an immense weight pressed upon her life with an ever-increasing intensity as the months rolled on. She had prepared herself to resist active persecution, to brave punishment, and to disregard threats and preachments. But she had not fortified her mind against, for she could not have conceived, this system of conquering a rebel will, not by bending or breaking, but by dissolving it.

One specimen of this method of killing the moral individual and paralysing the volition, by creating a void around the heart and soul, may be cited from an experience of convent discipline which Stella acquired shortly after she entered the community.

The convent of Santa Filomena did not receive young persons to be educated as a regular part of its system. But there were a few other inmates besides Stella, who were residing there for different reasons;—one or two, like her, sentenced by their relatives to a term of convent discipline as a punishment; and a few others, who had found an asylum there under various circumstances.

One of these boarders was a young Spanish girl, whose parents, settled at Leghorn, had been led by a connexion with some one having authority

or interest in the convent, to place her there during their temporary return to Spain. She was about the same age as Stella; and, isolated as they were from all that was dear to either of them, and suffering horribly from thirst for some affection in the aridity of the moral desert around them, the two girls were drawn together, and a strong feeling of friendship had begun to spring up between them. Of course this was observed by the vigilant watchers around them, whose duty and occupation it was to note every smallest movement of the moral nature that had been sent to that charnel-house of the affections to be killed, and had been registered almost before the culprits themselves were aware of the nascent sentiment in their own hearts. And the result very soon manifested itself.

Stella received an order to attend the Mother Veronica after the morning service in the chapel.

She found the tall, gaunt old woman sitting bolt upright in a large chair near one of the windows which looked over the magnificent expanse of country to the southward.

There was neither anger nor any other recognisable expression in the hard still face and the deep dark eyes that gleamed out from under the heavy, black, overhanging brows of the old woman;—no expression, unless it were one of attentive watchfulness.

"Stand in front of me, daughter!" she said, after she had slightly bowed her head in return for Stella's profound reverence.

Stella obeyed; but her eyes, attracted by the view of the open country, from which she had so long been shut out, were profiting by the opportunity of stealing a prohibited pleasure.

"Draw down that blind!" said the Superior; and Stella obeyed in silence.

"I have to speak to you, my daughter, respecting an important point in your conduct. Take care that I may never have to speak on the same subject again. You have permitted yourself to conceive a special affection for your fellow-pensioner the Spanish girl, Elisabetta Pinta, and to manifest the ill-regulated sentiment by making her in a marked and special manner your companion and associate. She has sinned equally on her side. I bid you to repress any such excessive feeling, and cease any such conduct as may indicate the existence of it. In this house, my daughter, one affection of the heart only"—(here the Superior pointed with her long withered hand to a crucifix suspended on the opposite wall)—"can be cultivated or permitted."

"Is it wrong, holy mother, for Christians to love each other?" asked Stella, not satirically, but with simple astonishment.

"It is wrong, daughter, for those who seek to

attain perfection to love one fellow-creature more than another, or any one in such sort that it may interfere with our love for heavenly things. It is not only wrong, it is sin!—Not mortal sin in your case, for you have not as yet undertaken the obligations of a religious life;—but dangerous sin. Take this little book, my daughter. It is the work of a very learned man, and is recommended to the Church, and specially to the religious of our sex, by no less an authority than that of St. Charles, the sainted Archbishop of Milan.* Let it be the study of your every unemployed hour. You will find it a most precious and sure guide towards that perfection to which it is my duty to direct your efforts. And remember, that although the precepts and directions it contains are particularly addressed to professed nuns, they are equally applicable (save as regards the degree of sin incurred by disregard of them) to all who wish to walk in the narrow path of virtue, and specially so to such as have been placed in a religious house with a view to the correction and mortification of their carnal and self-seeking will. Turn to page 87, my daughter, and read aloud the passage I have there marked.”

* *Specchio Religioso per le Monache*. “Religious Mirror for Nuns” is the title of a little book set forth by authority of St. Carlo Borromeo for the instruction of nuns in the complete duties of their vocation. It has been often reprinted. The edition before me was printed at Venice in 1611.

Stella did as she was bid, and read with an accent that, without any such intention on her part, betrayed the *naïve* astonishment the words occasioned her, the marked passage :

“Particularly let confessors use every endeavour, and be sedulously watchful, prudent, and assiduous in prayer, for the removal of special friendships (between the inmates of a cloister), which are the destruction* of the spirit, and a cause of infinite spiritual ruin.”

“Turn again, my daughter, to page 183, and read the passage you will there find marked.”

Again Stella read with astonishment, in which indignation and disgust this time were mingled :

“If the mistress of the secular girls in the convent observe that any one of those secular girls have an ill-regulated affection for another of the same class, or for any nun, and fail to correct it, or in case her admonitions should be disregarded, omit to bring the same to the knowledge of the Superior, she sins grievously.”

“You will observe, my daughter,” resumed the Superior, in the same cold, hard, passionless tones, “that the holy precepts here given are not only by implication, but expressly extended to persons in your position. I trust that you will profit by them. I will pray that the careful study of every part of that blessed book may lead you forwards in that

* The word in the original is, literally, “the moth.”

path of self-repression and abnegation, to which it is my duty to guide, and, if need be, to compel you. You may retire, my daughter !”

This incident has been related merely as a sample of the sort of “spiritual influences” by which it was sought to crush and kill every human sentiment in the unfortunate subject of them, till, in the death-like void thus created, volition itself, and the energy needed for resistance, should cease to exist. It is difficult for those who have happily never been subjected to any such process, to conceive the nature and manner of its operation. It is not by persuading the intelligence, or even by alarming the conscience, that the result is attained. It is by numbing and paralysing the whole moral nature. It is a process of slow poisoning. Nothing can be done by it in a week; little, perhaps, in the case of a healthy moral subject, in a month. Strong organisation, a specially sound mind in a specially sound body, may resist it for many months. But it must be an exceptionally vigorous idiosyncrasy on which it will not in time produce its calculated effect, and bring the patient to the perfection so justly set forth by the formula, “*utpote cadaver.*”

In the dreadful vacuity of the long hours Stella did not fail to read from beginning to end the work recommended to her by the Superior. In many

parts it excited her unmixed scorn and disgust. Several sections of it were wholly incomprehensible to her. And a few afforded her the advantage of a little amusement, as when she found it declared, on the authority of St. Chrysostom, that although a nun's shoes might be patched and in holes, still she might sin grievously by having them too clean!

Poor Stella! Had she known how great a man was the celebrated Archbishop of Milan, who puts forth this wisdom for the guidance of the weaker sex, she would have been still more painfully mystified. As it was, she decided in her own little mind that the author must be some cruel uncle or other, who was reducing to a system the theory of compelling hapless girls to marry against their will. It was very strange and very shocking that such books should be, and some day she would ask Giulio about it. Some day! And then "tears, idle tears, rose from the heart and gathered in the eye," as she thought of the days that were no more, and of the long and terrible prospect before her of the days that must be passed before the others could return—if ever!—if not too late! No! it should not be too late! She would strive against the numbing death around her. She would keep her heart and her will alive. Never, never, never! would she utter the words that should make her the wife of any save one, or

those other less dreadful, but still hope-excluding words, which should consign her to the loveless living grave of a cloister !

Yes ! It was a brave little heart !

Slowly and painfully the heavy hours dragged themselves to the close of each unchanging day. Slowly the interminable days massed themselves into weeks and months ; and the dull routine of the convent life rolled on, like some dead Lethe stream, monotonous as death—eventless, aimless.

But the brave little heart, though drooping sorely, was not conquered.

There had come no word or token from the outer world to keep hope and courage alive. But neither had it been possible for her to send any word of communication to her friends. And Stella had the good sense to reflect that the silence of those without was doubtless to be attributed only to the same difficulties which had prevented her from communicating with them. These difficulties she had as yet found to be insurmountable. The only human beings who ever entered the convent were persons known to the Superior for many years, and wholly in her confidence. And even those were invariably accompanied by one of the older nuns during the whole time that their functions required their presence within the walls. On the rare occasions, when any secular person was

permitted to speak with any one of the inmates of the convent in the "*parlatorio*," not only was the stranger required to remain on one side of a grating running across the entire chamber, while the nun or pensioner visited was on the other, but one of the older nuns was always present at the interview, and took especial care that the recluse did not approach within a yard or two of the grating.

In a word, it seemed to Stella that all idea of holding any communication with the outer world must be given up as utterly hopeless.

One distant hope had loomed faintly on the horizon, and had after a while faded away. The Spanish girl, Elisabetta Pinta, had hoped to be recalled home on her parents' return from Spain that winter. And in prospect of this a letter from Stella to Giulio, under cover to Francesca, had been prepared with much precaution and difficulty, and entrusted to her friend's care. This could not be left to be done when the departure of the happy released one was absolutely fixed. For expressly to provide against the possibility that any inmates of the house might avail themselves of such an opportunity, no prisoner was permitted to know that the hour of her deliverance was at hand till she was summoned to her instant departure, and was from that moment, till she was

beyond the walls, kept under the closest surveillance. In vain Elisabetta had, at the cost of much risk of discovery, kept the dangerous letter by day and by night about her person, till the precious enclosure had nearly worn its way through the envelope! No summons came to the pining Spanish girl! The winter months commenced, and she had to resign herself to another year—an eternity to her imagination—of imprisonment. So that hope vanished, and the precious but dangerous letter had to be destroyed.

And then as the winter advanced on the top of that bleak hill, the comfortless austerity of the convent life added a very considerable amount of bodily suffering to the trials against which Stella had to struggle. But this part of the burden laid on her, she found herself able to despise more thoroughly than she could the sickness of heart from hope long deferred, and the weight of the moral solitude around her.

But still, though sorely, sorely tried, the brave little heart was not yet conquered, nor the power of resistance yet crushed out of it!

And early in the next year, before the end of January, when Stella had been at Montepulciano about six months, an event happened in the convent—a very great event—indeed, the greatest which can occur in convent annals!

One bitterly cold morning the venerable Mother Veronica did not appear in her place in the choir at matins. This already was an event, which caused much talking in cautious under tones, for the like had not been known for more than a quarter of a century. But when the hour for the next office came, and still the Superior did not make her appearance, two of the oldest nuns went together to her cell, and—found that the Mother Veronica had been that night summoned to sing her matin-song in another and a yet holier choir.

The amount of excitement caused in the convent by this unexpected event proved that, whatever degree of success might have attended the process of killing out all the more genial sentiments from the desiccated hearts of those poor votaries of St. Ursula, they had not become so entirely "*utpote cadaver*"—such thorough corpses—as not to be eager for power and dominion over other corpses. Who was to succeed to the post of Abbess? That was the one thought which occupied, for once busily, every heart and head in the community.

For Stella the question had small interest. To her the Mother Veronica had been neither kind nor cruel; she had been merely the mechanical instrument by which the system performed its work. Stella had no reason to fear that the do-

minion of a new gaoler would be more intolerable to her than had been that of the old woman who was gone; and quite as little had she any ground of hope that the change would bring with it any mitigation of her doom. Even the interregnum did not effect this. One of the oldest nuns was entrusted with the authority of the Superior temporarily. She was a coarser and less lady-like old woman than the Mother Veronica; but the system was too strong for any part of its routine to be affected by any such small matters. All went on as usual. And Stella said to herself with a sigh, that the question of who was to be the new Superior was utterly without interest to her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW ABBESS.

SOME little time elapsed before the appointment of a new Superior of the convent of the Ursulines at Montepulciano was decided on. It had been expected in the convent that the oldest of the community, who had for some years discharged the functions of Vice-Superior, would have been appointed to the vacant post. But this had not been the case. Whether it was that the recent movement in every department of social life throughout Italy, and the still threatening signs of the times, had counselled the ecclesiastical superiors to put their house in order, and endeavour after such ameliorations in the ecclesiastical world as might enable them to show in some degree a better front to their enemies in the day of reckoning

which was probably approaching—or from the influence of any other circumstances—so it was that a certain degree of careful selection seemed to have been exercised in making the appointment of the new Abbess; and when the choice was announced, the members of the little community were not a little disgusted to learn that they were to receive a Superior from another convent of the same rule in a distant city.

Early in the following April—the April of 1850, that is to say—two old women in the not altogether unpicturesque costume of the Augustine rule were walking, or rather sauntering, in the grateful spring sunshine, under the sheltered wall of the convent garden. One was a tall, large, hard-featured woman, bent with age and rheumatism, though she was only sixty-five : Sister Giuseppa, who had expected to be the new Superior. The other, a trim, dapper, little old dame, alert and upright, though nearly of the same age as her companion : Sister Maria.

They moved every now and then a few steps along the sunny walk, barred at regular intervals with black stripes of shade cast by the battlements on the top of the southern wall of the garden, which was also the wall of the city; and then would stop awhile, facing each other, and conversing together with much gesticulation, while it might have been observed, by any one who watched

them closely, that as they spoke they assured themselves by sharp suspicious glances along the wall in either direction, that there was no danger that their conversation should be overheard. It was curious to observe, as any one might have done, who could have seen the two old women without overhearing any part of their discourse, how unmistakably their gesticulation, without the information derived from their dress, would have sufficed to make it certain that they were nuns.

“It is our duty to bless the hand of the Lord, Sister Maria, even when it brings us tribulation!” said Sister Giuseppa, with a sigh and an upward look.

“And it does not become us to judge, Sister Giuseppa!—especially hastily. Though it is true that this new Superior has now been here nearly a month!” returned Sister Maria, cautiously.

“It needs less to recognise the marks of a true vocation, sister! God forbid that I should presume to censure our excellent Bishop, who, if he does make a monstrous mistake now and then, does all for the glory of God; but it might seem to many minds that it was an unwise determination—I would not say prompted by mundane considerations—to seek so far afield for a successor to the Mother Veronica, of blessed memory; who, if she was, as all must admit, austere, tyrannical, trouble-

some, and—God forgive me for saying so—singularly uncharitable and spiteful”—and Sister Giuseppa held up her tremulous lean hands towards heaven in a manner appropriate to the sense of her parenthesis, while she shook her old head and protruded her lips in illustration of the sentiment in the latter clause of her speech—“yet was, on the whole, a very holy woman, and had a true vocation.”

“Doubtless,” returned Sister Maria, “so holy a man as our Bishop knew what he was about, and that is enough for us! Nevertheless, at the same time, I confess that I agree entirely with you, sister, in feeling that it was an injustice to give this vacant place to any save you, the oldest among us, the wisest, and most prudent—the most humble in discourse—the most patient in trouble——”

“Hush! hush! sister! It is not well to speak so! These are vain words, and I am far from deserving the praises which your holy conscience dictates to you. I certainly might feel that an injustice has been done me; but God forbid! I always say, ‘God’s will be done!’ But I am grieved for your sake, Sister Maria, for had I been Abbess, I should at once have chosen you for my Vice-Superior; for you have such an excellent heart, so mild and gentle, a chastened tongue!——

But what is done is done. We must resign ourselves to the will of the Lord !”

“ Still it is impossible to deny, Sister Giuseppa, that since this stranger has been here, now nearly a month, she has acted in a manner to alarm one seriously for the future of the house !”

“ Truly it would seem to be the Lord’s will to prove us with trials, sister !” replied Sister Giuseppa, unctuously.

“ Only last Friday she went down into the kitchen, and constrained that excellent woman, Sister Guglielmina, our cook, to serve up for the pensioners the only bit of fish that had come in, saying that at their tender age they required more than us, and that their parents paid for their sufficient treatment. Bread and vegetables were our fare !”

“ Oh ! it is an upsetting of all the foundations of authority and holy obedience !” exclaimed Sister Giuseppa, with holy horror.

“ Then, again, she has insisted that from the beginning of next month we shall abandon the special privilege obtained for this house by that holy man, the Chancellor of the diocese, of deferring our matins till one hour after sunrise ! I am but a poor simple nun, Sister Giuseppa ! But that seems to me to savour of heresy !”

“ Surely ! surely ! it is a denying of the dispensing

power! Santa Orsola, *ora pro nobis!*” ejaculated Sister Giuseppa, crossing herself as she spoke.

“And then the liberty she accords the pensioners! Our house will lose its high credit for holy discipline! Oh! it is very grievous!”

“But I am on the watch! Sister Maria; I am on the watch!” And a vicious gleam shot from under the old woman’s brow as she spoke. “Not for the sake of injuring anybody! God and the Madonna forbid! But for the glory of God and the credit of the house!”

“Right! Sister Giuseppa! and if you can see anything—anything you know that ought to reach the ears of that holy man the Chancellor——”

“*A chi lo dite,* sorella mia, a chi lo dite!*” exclaimed the old woman, nodding her head up and down. “Trust old Sister Giuseppa not to neglect a painful duty—when it is for the glory of God!”

“And the credit of the house!”

“Ay! surely, the credit and reputation of our holy house!”

“But prudence!——”

“And vigilance!——”

“For the glory of God!——”

“We understand each other, Sister Maria! I’ll go and see if she has been in the kitchen again this morning! The Lord be with you, sister!”

* “To whom do you say it, my sister!” A common phrase, meaning, “Is it needed to tell me that?”

said old Giuseppa, turning to go towards the convent.

"The Lord watch over you, sister!" returned Sister Maria;" adding, as she looked after the other hobbling down the sunny garden walk, "a sly old hypocrite, she is! and fancies that she may yet live to be Abbess! Well, well! we shall see!"

And as she slowly continued her walk in the sunshine, Sister Maria took her rosary in her hand, and occupied herself edifyingly with telling her beads as she walked.

A few days after this, the same garden walk was, at a later hour of the day, the scene of another conversation, which also turned upon the subject naturally uppermost in the thoughts of all the little community—the new Superior. But this time the subject was considered from a different stand-point.

It was the hour after the mid-day meal, when, according to the custom of the convent, the pensioners were permitted to take their recreation and exercise in the garden. And Stella, and her young Spanish friend, Elisabetta Pinta, were taking advantage of that relaxation of discipline which had so scandalised their elders, to enjoy a long and uninterrupted conversation, without the fear of being punished on the report of Sister Benedetta, their overlooker and spy, for the crime of having

manifested inordinate affection for a fellow-creature.

“One thing, Lisa *mia*, at all events, you cannot deny,” said Stella, “and that is, the singular graciousness of her presence. It is not only that she is remarkably handsome, but there is a sort of unassuming dignity about her that is as different as possible from poor old Mother Veronica’s manner.”

“Oh, as far as appearances go,” returned the Spanish girl, “they are altogether in her favour. I admit that I do not remember to have ever seen any one whose look and manners prepossessed me so strongly in their favour.”

“And then,” continued Stella, who appeared to be not so much defending a decisively-formed opinion, as debating a question with a view to arriving at such, “it must be admitted that we have already something more than mere appearances to judge by. Here we are freely talking together, despite all the extraordinary things in that detestable little book of the Mother Veronica’s! That could not have been in her time. To what but real kind-heartedness in Mother Madalena are we to attribute the change?”

“That is all very true!” rejoined the other girl, thoughtfully; “and then it is impossible not to see that old Sister Giuseppa hates her bitterly already, and that is a very good sign.”

“ I confess,” said Stella, “ that I feel myself drawn towards her in a manner that is quite new to me. I never knew a mother, *Lisa mia* ; I never knew anybody—any woman, who seemed to me as if I could love her, as this new Superior does ! I know it is unreasonable to form such an opinion of anybody in so short a time ; but, *che vuoi !* * It seems to me like an instinct.”

“ And I, Stella dear, have not a word to say on the other side, except that she is an Abbess !” returned Elisabetta. “ I feel the truth of all you say in her favour. I am unable to withstand the charm of her manner myself. *Mi è sommamente simpatica !* † And all I say or feel is, that in our position it is well to be cautious in trusting to appearances. She is, despite of all, I say once more, an Abbess !”

“ But don’t you think, Lisa dear, that your prejudice against her is at least as unreasonable as mine in her favour ?” said Stella, argumentatively.

“ But I have no prejudice against her, Stella !” returned the other. “ On the contrary, I, too, am prejudiced in her favour ; but I would be cautious.

* “ What would you ?”

† “ She is extremely agreeable to me.” This phrase, however, but very imperfectly translates the meaning of the word “ *simpatica*,” which is one of continual recurrence in an Italian mouth. It expresses all that unreasoned liking which we feel for some persons, we should be puzzled to say why.

I do not know that she can hurt me much in any way, except by making the rest of my time a little more or a very little less detestable. But, in your case, I would be very cautious before I was tempted into giving her my confidence!"

"I will be cautious, Lisa dear! But though I shut up that part of my heart from her which contains all my most precious secrets, I need not shut it against her altogether! It would be so sweet, oh! so sweet to me, to be able to love such a woman! There is something, I know not what, in the mild sadness of her eye that is inconceivably attractive to me. It seems to me impossible that she should not have a kind and gentle heart. I am surprised at myself, Lisa," continued Stella, thoughtfully, after a pause, "for feeling so much attracted by so thoroughly and unchangingly melancholy a face—I, who was always so gay, and loved none but those who were as gay as I. I suppose it is that I am altogether changed myself!" added the poor girl, with a deep sigh.

Stella was, indeed, changed by the now nine months of her convent imprisonment, not only, as she herself remarked, in disposition, but in appearance. Perhaps she was even more attractively lovely than she had ever been before a sad thought had ever given shade to the unchequered sunshine of her face. The last nine months of her life had

caused her not only to suffer, but also to think more than she had ever done before. And the awakening of the intelligence, and in no slight degree the trumpet-call, which had roused all the dormant energy and force of volition in her character, had wonderfully spiritualised the beauty of her features, and added the higher charm of sentiment and sympathetic intelligence to the Hebe-like unclouded sunlight of her face, as it had been before sorrow had ever touched it. She seemed, also, to be somewhat taller. But possibly that was only the effect of the triflingly increased slightness of her figure, which told of the work confinement, anxiety, and sorrow had done on her.

For all that, the brave heart was still as unconquered as ever !

She had declared to herself, at the time of the death of the late Superior, that her removal and the appointment of a successor were matters which could have no interest for her. The being kept in gaol so much outweighed in importance any difference that could be made by a little more or a little less of kindness in her gaoler, that all consideration of the latter sort seemed to her not worth a thought. But she had latterly begun to think that this might be a mistake. And the small amount of intercourse which had, as yet, taken place between the new Superior and the little pensioner,

had already begun to produce the effects on the mind of the latter, which showed themselves in the foregoing confidential conversation.

The rooted and very natural conviction that the Superior of their prison-house must, *ex officio*, and in the nature of things, be their enemy and tyrant, as surely as the wolf is the enemy of the lamb, was beginning with difficulty to give way before the magnetic influence of the new Lady Abbess. To Stella, the disposition and feelings of this Superior were infinitely more important than to her friend. The Spanish girl had said truly, that to her, whose reclusion would shortly come to its previously proposed end, the character of the Superior was comparatively unimportant. But to Stella, in the struggle between her and her family, and specially in that last phase of that struggle which would have to be fought over her acceptance or rejection of the veil—a stage of her troubles which she began to think would assuredly sooner or later overtake her—the part to be taken by the Abbess might be all important. Nevertheless, it had been Stella, as has been seen, who had been the first to yield herself to the influence of the stranger. The more worldly, more experienced, and harder-minded shrewdness of the little Leghorn *bourgeoise*, clung more obstinately to that fundamental Catholic girl's doctrine, that an Abbess

was always an Abbess, and as such to be feared, kept at a distance (from all the jealously-guarded girlish inner life), and distrusted accordingly.

Had it not been for her friend's cautious counsel, Stella would, before that time, have given herself up to the influences which so strongly attracted her.

It was a little later than the date of the conversation between the two girls which has been given, about the beginning of May, that Stella received a summons to attend the Abbess in her apartment.

It was at a very early hour; and the large *persiane*,* which protected the great window of the Abbess's parlour, and which would at a later hour have been necessarily closed, were thrown wide open. The window itself, looking on a little balcony, was also open, giving the parlour the appearance of a large box at the theatre, the stage and scenery of which was supplied by the wide and lovely prospect to the southward, which has been already described. A sweet, warm, southern breeze from the Perugia hills was blowing in at the window, and had any person sensitive to the poetry and the influences of external objects, been per-

* The common name for the great green blinds, made of strips of wood, after the manner of what we call Venetian blinds, but much larger and heavier, and made to shut and open outwards, door-fashion, which the Italian sun renders so absolutely necessary a defence.

mitted to contemplate the room, its accessories, and the prospect of country it commanded, he would assuredly have been inclined to think that—

If there be peace in the world to be found,
The heart that is weary might hope for it here.

Hearts that are weary, however, have long since discovered the vanity of any such expectations. To healthy limbs the soft bed may be delicious; but to the fevered body the softest can bring no rest. And the observer who could have watched the Lady Abbess, as she sat waiting for the interview she had appointed, would have had little difficulty in assuring himself that there was a weary heart to which all the peace-breathing beauty of the scene had brought no peace.

Yet the new Abbess did not, like poor old Mother Veronica, seek to shut out the lovely view of God's world, merely because it was lovely. On the contrary, she was sitting in a large, but hard and straight-backed, arm-chair close to the open window. Anybody on the top of the mountain behind Spoleto, some forty miles or more away to the southward, if provided with a sufficiently powerful telescope, could have seen the full length sitting figure of the Abbess framed in the *persiane*-bordered window of the Montepulciano convent.

The hour was one of those at which the view was

especially beautiful. For the rising sun, just beginning to gild the tops of the main chain of the Apennine to the eastward, was producing an endless and constantly changing variety of effects of light and shade over the whole vast extent of the lowlands which contain the lakes of Perugia and Bolsena, of Chiusi and Montepulciano. One after another the bald tops of the hoary old mountains were glorified into a transient semblance of youthful warmth by the mocking ray, which anon left each in the cold shade to laugh its morning greeting to a neighbour bald-head.

The high ground around Perugia hides from the hill-top of Montepulciano the greater part of the still higher but more distant main range of the Apennine farther eastward. But to the south-east, some higher tops show themselves on the far horizon, scarcely visible unless when rendered so by snow on their summits, or more transiently by the gilding of the rising sun. As the Abbess sat, leaning her cheek on one long slender hand, the white taper fingers of which rested on her pale blue-veined temples, while her elbow rested on the flat wooden arm of the large chair, and her eyes, unwaited on by her thoughts, watched the gay young sun flouting the ancient grey hills, one lofty top of rather remarkable angular shape was brought into temporary prominence, and

seemed by its appearance to attract her absent thoughts.

She sighed deeply, and held forth the hand on which she was not leaning with the palm turned to the window, as if to shut out from her eyes the view of that particular hill-top, while she moved her head in the opposite direction. In a few minutes the ray had passed, and the remarkably shaped hill had retired into cold obscurity.

“Not long!” said the Abbess, in a sad, gentle voice, shaking her head slowly, while two large tears gathered in her eyes. “Not long!” she said; and these were the only words she uttered. The mountain-top which had seemed thus singularly to attract her attention, was one of that part of the chain of the Apennines immediately behind Foligno. It rears its strangely-shaped head on one side of the pass, by which the road crosses the mountains from that city into the Romagna, and is a prominent object in that part of the great valley of the Tiber.

The new Abbess of Santa Filomena was a remarkable woman in appearance. The two girls, Stella and her Spanish friend, have already told us that she was singularly handsome. She was not at that period above forty years old; and her more than usual height and remarkable grace of action and attitude gave a character of peculiar

dignity to her presence, which assorted well with her present position. The mild sadness which habitually rested on the regular but somewhat attenuated features of her perfectly pale oval face, and which seemed to exclude the possibility of rigour or severity, might perhaps have been deemed by her ecclesiastical superiors less satisfactorily adapted to it. There was a certain air, too, of almost listless languor pervading the graceful movements of her elegantly-formed figure, which might have seemed to argue the absence of a sufficient amount of that unimpassioned but unwearying energy, which the strong-handed coercion of human wills demands. On the whole, it was difficult, as Stella had found it, and declared it to be, to look on the Abbess without feeling attracted towards her, and acquiring the conviction that she was a woman to be loved rather than feared.

When Stella entered the room in which the Abbess was sitting, the latter was still absorbed in the thoughts, whatever they were, which had been occupying her, and was not roused from her reverie by the noiseless entrance of the little pensioner. Stella came in front of the great chair, therefore, between the Abbess and the window, and stooped down, about to kiss the holy mother's hand. But the latter, as Stella bent forward her gracious head, placed her hand upon it caressingly, and,

leaning forward in her chair, prevented the young girl's intention by kissing her on the forehead.

"Sit there, my daughter," said the Abbess, pointing to a chair on the other side of a small table near her, after a minute's pause, during which Stella, blushing with pleasure at the manner of her reception, had remained standing in front of the large arm-chair, while the Abbess bent a glance of benevolent but inquiring scrutiny on the saddened young face before her.

"Your name, my child, is——?"

"Stella Altamari, your reverence," answered Stella, using the accustomed title given by a nun to the superior of her convent.

"Do not call me so; the title does not please me, Stella! You may call me Mother; but do not follow the silly fashion of adding 'Holy' to a title already in itself sufficiently sacred. Will you oblige me in this, Stella?"

"Yes, my mother!" said Stella, scarcely above her breath.

"I have sent for you, my daughter," resumed the Abbess, "to speak to you with reference to a letter I have received from your uncle, the Canonico Adalberto Altamari. It would have been my wish, as it is my duty, to have become better acquainted with you, and the other young persons placed under my care, before now. But I have been prevented

from doing so by the various business that has pressed on me since my arrival here. And now it is necessary for me to speak to you on the subject of this letter, before I have learned to know you, and before I have had an opportunity of inspiring you, my daughter, with confidence in me."

Stella attempted, not very successfully, to mutter something of a protest that such was not the case; and the Abbess proceeded:

"I fear, my daughter, that your case is no exception to the general rule, which shows that sorrow in some form or other is the recruiting agent of convents. Will you give me your statement of the causes which led to your becoming an inmate here?"

"*Madre mia*," replied Stella, obeying the directions she had received respecting the manner in which the new Superior chose to be addressed, "I am an orphan. I was brought up by my aunt, the Contessa Zenobia Altamari. She and my uncle, the Canonico, wish me to make a marriage to which I cannot consent. I am sent here for refusing to comply with their wishes."

"You have been here more than nine months, I find. Are you at all more disposed, my daughter, to obey your legal guardian in the matter of your marriage, than when you in the first instance refused to do so?"

Stella shook her pretty little head, sadly and gravely, as she replied: "I am not, my mother! I shall never be so!"

"Have you been happy, my daughter," asked the Superior again, after a pause, during which she seemed plunged in thought—"have you been at least tranquil and at peace, during the months you have passed within these walls?"

"I have not been happy, my mother; I have been very unhappy all the time," said Stella, while a tear stole down her no longer blooming cheek, at the thought of the long, long hours of her captivity.

"Are you disposed, my daughter, to accept the alternative of becoming a professed member of this house, rather than accede to the proposals made to you?"

"*Madre mia!*" exclaimed poor Stella, in an accent of distress, "I am not disposed to accept any such alternative. I have no vocation to become a nun. My only wish and hope is to leave this convent. And, is it not the case, my mother, that those who take the veil ought to choose cloister life with their own free will?"

"Assuredly such is the case, my daughter. I am requested by the Canon, your uncle—perhaps I ought to say, 'directed,' " added the Abbess, with a slightly perceptible tone of bitterness in her voice,

“to set forth to you the assumption of the veil in this convent as the only alternative of obedience to your guardians in the matter of your marriage. But, without taking upon me at present to offer you any advice respecting the latter alternative, I am constrained, in obedience to a higher obligation, to declare to you that it would be my bounden duty, or that of any other person filling a similar position, absolutely to refuse to admit you to make your profession, without being well assured that it is your matured and serious wish to do so.”

“Then I cannot be constrained against my will to become a nun, my mother?” asked Stella, eagerly.

“Many unhappy women, daughter, have been constrained against their will to become nuns, by threats, by weariness, by fear, by loss of hope. But they have not possessed—or not retained, God help them!—sufficient courage to resist. She who has such courage cannot be compelled to take the veil. The act must be your own.”

“Oh, thanks! thanks! my mother; in that case, I can answer clearly that I shall never become a nun.”

“Nor will you accept the marriage proposed to you by your family?” asked the Abbess again, after another thoughtful pause.

“Oh, my mother! that would be worse—far

worse ! Indeed, indeed you do not know ! They cannot have told you all the truth. No ! Never, never, never !”

“My child !” answered the Abbess, kindly, rising as she spoke, and coming in front of Stella, “as you say, I do *not* know. Your family have not communicated anything to me, beyond the facts that an honourable marriage has been proposed to you, which you unreasonably and rebelliously reject, and that your guardians are not disposed to allow you any other alternative, save compliance with their wishes or the veil. It is desired that I should enforce on you the necessity of choosing one of these two. But my duty and my conscience compel me to tell you that you must not, and cannot, choose the latter in opposition to your own intimate wishes and convictions. With regard to the former, I am unable to attempt giving you any counsel, because I am in entire ignorance of all the circumstances of the case.”

Stella did not rise, as she ought to have done according to the convent code of etiquette, which, indeed, had been already sufficiently set at naught by her, sitting at all in the presence of the Abbess. She remained seated ; and looked piteously and pleadingly up into the sympathising face of the tall, slight figure bending over her, as she said : “You do not think, then, mother, that under all

circumstances and in every case, it is the bounden duty of a young girl to accept any marriage that her friends may propose to her?"

She clasped her hands as she ceased speaking, with a gesture of earnest appeal, as if to the arbiter of her fate.

The Abbess did not reply immediately; but, turning away from the suppliant figure before her to the open window, seemed for a while to be plunged in deep thought. At last she said:

"Come hither, my child!"

Stella rose, and advanced a few paces towards the open window.

"Here, to my side!" continued the Abbess, who was standing close to the sill of the window, which opened, as has been said, on a little balcony.

Stella did as she was bid, timidly, and not without a manifestation of surprise in her manner.

The Abbess took her little trembling hand in hers, and looked fixedly into her face yet a minute before she spoke:

"I can have no hesitation, my dear child," she said at length, "in telling you that no girl is bound under all circumstances to acquiesce in any proposal of marriage that may be made to her, even though it were urged on her to do so by her own parents, instead of, as in your case, by her guardians only. No girl should be persuaded to marry

against the inclination of her heart. To do so is a sin against God, and against nature. Thus much is clear. But, my daughter, it is the duty of any young person in the unhappy position of being required by those in authority over her to act in opposition to her own inclinations in this matter, to question those inclinations carefully; to examine the grounds on which they rest; to ascertain, as far as serious self-investigation will enable her to do, whether, indeed, her opposition to the wishes of those who must be presumed to be interested in her welfare, be based on any reasonable grounds, or whether it may arise from the thoughtless petulance of an inexperienced child—a mere caprice, which, if yielded to, may cause the bitter repentance of many a future year.”

Stella shook her head sadly as the Abbess spoke; and when she ceased, looked up with clear and frank eyes to meet the scrutinising look of the Superior.

“*Madre mia!*” she said, “I have not been influenced by girlish caprice. I *abhor* the man whom I am bid to accept as my husband. My guardians, you say, my mother, must be presumed to be anxious for my welfare. No doubt they are so, as they understand welfare. They wish me to be enormously rich. The person they want me to marry is very wealthy. He has vast estates, as big, I believe, or bigger than those of my family. My guardians are very desirous of joining all these

estates together. They think what a very fine and grand property that would make. But they do not think of what I myself should become! My mother, I believe that the man whom they want me to marry, has no quality that should conciliate love. It is at all events true, that to me he is *antipatico* in the highest degree. And—pardon me, my mother, for saying so—but not even in compliance with your counsel could I ever consent to marry the Marchese Alfonso Malatesta.”

Stella felt the fingers of the Abbess's hand, which had held hers while she had been speaking, close on it with a convulsive grasp, as the last words escaped from her lips. The tall and somewhat drooping figure of the Abbess suddenly stiffened itself into a rigidly upright attitude; the face and even the lips became lividly pale; and after remaining thus as it were transfixed for a few instants, assisting herself by her hold on Stella's hand, she sank into the large chair from which she had risen. Her head fell back on the chair, and she closed her eyes, while the grasp which she had all this while kept on Stella's hand was loosened.

Stella feared that the Abbess had fainted, and availed herself of the relaxation of the grasp of her hand to seek for water in the chamber which adjoined the Superior's sitting-room.

She had returned with a glass of water in her

hand, and was standing with it, hanging over the Abbess, uncertain whether she had absolutely fainted, or was still conscious, when a tap was heard at the door.

The Abbess, whatever may have been the feeling which moved her thus strongly, had not lost her consciousness, or even presence of mind. For, before Stella could decide whether it behoved her to bid the applicant for admission enter, the Superior raised herself in the chair, and, though still deadly pale, answered, in her usual firm but gentle voice :

“ You may enter ! ”

The door was opened, even as the words passed her lips, in a manner which indicated that had the permission to come in been delayed, the applicant would not have waited for it ; and Sister Giuseppa advanced one step into the room.

“ I came, your reverence,” said the old woman, crossing her arms upon her bosom and bowing as she spoke, “ to inform you, as it was my duty to do, that the pensioner Stella was not with the other pensioners at the spiritual exercises after matins. I was not aware that she was with your reverence, for no such intimation was made to me—as it ought to have been.”

“ It is well, Sister Giuseppa ; you may retire ! ”

“ Will your reverence permit me to mention,

that when the Mother Veronica of blessed memory had occasion to speak with any of the pensioners in this room, it was her habit to close the blinds of that window."

"Thank you, Sister Giuseppa! It is a discretionary matter. I prefer to keep the blinds open."

The old nun shot a malignant glance at her Superior from under her overhanging eyebrows, and again bowing in silence, left the room.

"I will now dismiss you also, my dear child," said the Abbess. "Some things in our conversation, touching on matters long since forgotten—or at least long since past—have moved me in a manner that is unusual with me. We will speak together again before long. In the mean while, I will pray, my child, that the difficulties in your position may be smoothed for you."

And the Abbess, instead of dismissing her with the usual formal benediction, imparted by a flourish of the fingers, again placed her hand on the sun-bright tresses of Stella's head, and pressed her lips to her forehead.

CHAPTER V.

MEMORY VERSUS HOPE.

ON the evening of the day after that on which the above conversation between Stella and the Abbess had taken place, at the hour after the evening meal, old Sister Giuseppa and Sister Maria found themselves alone together in the sort of ante-room which preceded the refectory.

“I tell you, Sister Maria, there is something wrong—something more wrong than we think for! It is not to be tolerated that a Mother Superior should behave in that way to a pensioner. I tell you, I saw her standing leaning over the girl, and she remained sitting!”

“Holy Virgin! what is the world coming to, Sister Giuseppa!”

“It is enough for us poor nuns,” rejoined old

Giuseppa, "to think what our convent is coming to! Steps must be taken, Sister Maria!—steps must be taken! To think, too, that there was the great window wide open, and the Superior a tempting the pensioner with showing her all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory thereof! God forgive me! I could not help speaking to her a word in season. She told me, forsooth, that she preferred it so!"

"Oh! it is very shameless, Sister Giuseppa! Surely we should altogether neglect our duty to ourselves and to this house if we did not keep that holy man the Chancellor informed of such things as these."

"I keep my eyes open! Sister Maria, never fear! Thank God! I know my duty; and though it is very painful to me to do anything that may give pain to others, when the glory of God is concerned I shall not shrink from it. Yes, yes! we shall see what the Chancellor thinks of superiors who talk standing to pensioners sitting down, and who have them in their room to tempt them with the world and the fairness thereof! We shall see!"

"Sister Giuseppa," said a younger nun, coming up at that moment, "the Holy Mother desires that the pensioner Stella may attend her in her room to-morrow morning immediately after matins, and

she directed that you should be informed of her orders."

"Oh! very well, Sister Assunta! It is very well! Inform the pensioner Stella of the Superior's wish. What do you think now, Sister Maria?"

"I am but a simple nun, Sister Giuseppa; I have not your prudence! I do not know what to think! but it is very shocking. Santa Orsola, *Ora pro nobis!*"

"We shall see! we shall see!" muttered old Sister Giuseppa.

Next morning, at the same hour as that of her previous interview, Stella again went to the apartment of the Abbess, and found it and her, despite the word in season of Sister Giuseppa, exactly as they had been on the former occasion. She was very pale, paler even, Stella thought, than usual; and after she had received her and caused her to be seated on the other side of the little table in front of the window, as before, she remained silent and apparently buried in thought for some time.

At length, raising her head from her hand, on which it had been resting, she said:

"You were telling me, my dear child, that your repugnance to the marriage proposed to you with the Marchese Alfonso Malatesta is invincible. Do you know how old a man is the Marchese?"

"I do not know exactly, my mother; I should

suppose, from what I have heard, that he cannot be much more than twenty. But oh! my mother, there is not any possibility that he should ever become more acceptable to me!"

"The young man, I presume, is the son of the Marchese Cesare Malatesta of Fermo," said the Abbess, with a little tremor in her voice; "I have often heard of the family as one of very large possessions not far from Ascoli, where all my cloister life was passed, till my superiors called me to preside over this convent."

"Yes?" said Stella, pensively, "the family is very rich, I believe; but oh! my mother, will that suffice to make my happiness?"

"Assuredly it will not, my daughter. And the young man himself, you say, is not such as you can love?"

"Indeed, my mother, he is not! He appeared to me insignificant both in mind and person;—a poor weak, mean creature in both!"

"One, it is to be feared, whom you could not have loved under any circumstances! Was your appreciation of these deficiencies quickened, perhaps, by contrasting them with the merits of another?"

"My mother——!" stammered Stella, casting her eyes on the ground, and blushing painfully all over her face and neck.

"Nay! my daughter," said the Abbess, who of

course saw the truth of the matter at a glance, "I will not press you for any confidence which you do not feel inclined to bestow on me. Nor is any confession on the subject needed to justify me in telling you, that it is clear to me that it can never be your duty to accept as a husband one towards whom your feelings are what you have described them. As I have told you that no commands can make it right for you to take the veil in opposition to your own feelings and inclination, so I tell you similarly of the other alternative proposed to you. But I wished to say a few words to you, my dear child, respecting the prospect of happiness, which, as it appears to you, would be open before you, if you were freed from your bondage here, and from the marriage your family has proposed to you. My child, the power of following the dictates of our own hearts and judgment in these matters does not always serve to secure happiness! It is a fearful risk, when a girl pushing herself adrift from all the moorings of her life, entrusts her all to the keeping of a man, merely on the faith of the feelings of her own heart! Men, my child, are cruelly, horribly deceitful; and women's hearts are very easily deceived!"

"It seems to me, my mother, if you will pardon my boldness in telling you my girlish thoughts——"

"Tell me them freely, my daughter! The real

workings of a guileless mind are always valuable."

"I was going to say, my mother, that as far as I can see, such words of caution as you were speaking just now, to be of any avail, should be spoken to those who have never loved. To the others it is too late! If it were possible to profit by the caution, it would be needless. Who could believe in the possibility of being deceived by him whom they love?"

"My child, my child!" said the Abbess, rising from her seat, and coming in front of Stella, so as to look down into the candid face, and sad but clear and guileless eyes of the young girl; "my child, you have put the poisoned chalice to your lips and have drunk! You have drunk that sweet intoxicating draught! Come hither, my child," continued the Abbess, turning to the window, and beckoning Stella to stand by her side. She raised her hand as pointing to the magnificent prospect beneath them, and seemed on the point of speaking; but paused as her eye ran over the circuit of the immense horizon. She allowed it to rest on that part of the prospect to the eastward, where the remarkably shaped mountain above Foligno had on the previously recorded occasion attracted her gaze. The lofty top was just visible; but it was not prominent in the landscape as it had been

for a few minutes on that morning, for it was in shade.

After yielding for a moment to her reverie, she continued, apparently not without an effort :

“ There is the world, my child ! It is very beautiful, very bright ! teeming with promises of life and love ! To go forth freely into its warmth and beauty, led by the one hand whose magic touch turns all to poetry and joy for us, seems to be all that the greediest of happiness could ask of fate. Does it not, my daughter ? Here, my child, within these sombre walls is the convent, the contrary to the world. It is cold, unlovely, silent ! No hum of life goes up from it. It is a living death ; a grave, where the pulse beats heavily, the heart becomes torpid, and the eye of the mind grows dim ! But within these walls despair may in time be charmed into lethargy ; and peace—bare peace—be welcomed as a refuge from the agony of a love deceived ! ”

“ *Madre mia !* ” said Stella, taking, as she spoke, the hand of the Abbess, and pressing it to her bosom, “ it seems to me that it would be making a bad return for the kindness you have shown me, and all the interest you are now taking in my fate, if I were to answer you aught else than the simple truth, even though it shows me bold and self-willed enough to reject all the most kindly-meant warn-

ing. But I cannot help it, and can only tell the truth. And, dear mother, the truth is, that if my happiness here and hereafter, my life, my soul, were in the hollow of my hand, I could give them all, all, all into his keeping——” She checked herself suddenly, as the thought flashed across her mind that she had betrayed the secret which she had intended to preserve as to the existence of any such HE; and a deep blush rushed with a burning sensation over her cheeks and neck, and pure white forehead. But a moment’s reflection led her judgment to acquiesce in what her heart had done, and she looked up through the tears, which the intensity of her earnestness had caused to gather in her eyes, as she continued, more calmly, but not less earnestly than before: “Yes! it is true, my mother! Forgive me if it seems too bold in me to say so; but it is true, that if I had a thousand times more than all I have or ever can have to give, I would give all without a thought or pause, ay, though all the wise ones of the world were whispering doubts and cautions in my ear! Is it wrong, *madre mia*,” she added, submissively and in a deprecating tone, “to feel thus?”

But the Abbess only answered with a sigh, as she looked earnestly at her: “You love much, my daughter!”

And Stella, who had never before known the

comfort of pouring out her heart's treasured passion to a kindred human heart, and who thirsted for its sympathy, asked again, almost in whispered words :

“Is it wrong, my mother, to feel thus?”

Again the Abbess paused, and appeared to be making an effort to speak the words that should contain a reply to the question thus a second time put to her. She let her eyes fall to the ground, and her arms droop pendent on either side of her tall, slender figure, and her lips became pale, as she answered at last :

“If it be sin, my daughter, to have felt as you feel, a fellow-sinner is standing by your side!”

“My mother!”

“It is even so, my daughter!—Listen to me, Stella,” she continued, after a pause; “I told you that I did not wish to press you to give me your confidence, unless your heart dictated to you to do so. I will, however, give *you mine*; for I know not why I should resist the feeling of sympathy which draws me towards you. It will be the first time,” she added, speaking more to herself than to her companion, “that I have ever shaped into words the haunting thoughts of twenty years.

“You tell me, Stella, that if your life, your fate, your very soul, were in the hollow of your hand, you would give them all, all, without a moment's

pause or shadow of misgiving, into the keeping of him you love. Child, I *did* that thing! I *did* entrust my absolute all to the good faith of one, whom I loved as well—yes! it seems strange, does it not? whom I, the Abbess, loved as well as you can love! Does it not seem incredible to you that this dried-up heart should have held the same dear secret that yours hoards now, as though the like was never felt before? Look at those love-lorn features of successive generations of desolate-hearted women!” she continued, pointing to the grim portraits of departed Abbesses hanging on the walls; “they look fit heroines for a love-tale, do they not! Do you think that none of those walked the same path to come to the same goal? I tell you, child, that that rose-strewn love-path is paved beneath the rose-leaves with women’s broken hearts! And at the end of it—an end soon reached—for the more fortunate weaklings lies the grave; for the helpless one, who cannot die, the living grave of the convent! But not so with my Tito, Pippo, Carlo, Cecco, you’ll say——”

“Not so with Giulio!” interposed Stella, with quiet little silver-voiced firmness, as though intolerant of hearing the idol of her worship designated in this M. or N. sort of fashion.

“Giulio!” echoed the Abbess, with a little start, and a sharp glance at Stella; but in the next instant

her mind dropped the idea that had for a moment arrested it, and returned to its previous course of thought.

“Well, Giulio be it! Not so with my Giulio! you’ll say. And should not I have said and sworn, not so with my Cesare! Should not I, too, even as you would, have smiled my disdain, if all the hoary wisdom which has preached in vain from Solomon’s day to this, had warned me to mistrust! How could I mistrust? I loved! We were married! See how fortunate I was, my child! I was the daughter of a poor lone widow; he was the son of a wealthy noble; there was nobody to send me into a distant convent to balk my will; and we were married. Do you not envy me my happiness! We went away together, my love and I, away into that bright and sunny world, to live for our love and for each other. It was a beautiful spot he took me to; the most beautiful spot, I think, I ever saw! Come here, child! here, close to me! Now look out to the mountains! there! just to the right of those lone pine-trees on the top of that hill on which the sunbeam is resting. Do you not see a singular-looking angularly-shaped mountain-head, the highest of that part of the chain?”

“Yes! now, my mother, I see it. The sun is just beginning to touch its top.”

“Exactly so, my child! It will be left in shade

soon ; but the sun always returns to it. It was different with me ! Exactly at the foot of that mountain, where the little stream from its side comes out into the plain through a little valley, all green and cool, is the place to which he took me. It is called Belfiore. A few short months only, a very few, Stella, my lifetime lasted. For that time was the whole of it ! And oh ! my child, may you be spared the agony I then endured ! Pray to God, my daughter, that you may never know the sharp, startling pang of the first doubt, the brave, loyal, but unavailing struggle against growing conviction ; the desperate fight against the evidence of facts, the irresistible certainty that all is lost, that the heart-wreck is complete, and then the dull cold void of final, unutterable despair ! I tell you—strive if possible to believe it, for it is true—I tell you, that my love was as your love is, my trust as your trust, my heart tender, brave, and loyal as yours ; and *that* was the cup that young Love presented to *my* girlish lips, the deadly draught to be savoured, each bitter drop by drop, even to the dregs. There—there I learned my lesson, and my heart died its slow death by torture, down in that beautiful world there—there, where the false mocking sunshine is even now painting over the horrible place with luring beauty !

“Then, my Stella, the refuge of the cold dull

cloister was only a little less welcome than that of the grave—the cloister, where such memories should have no place, my child! and where I had thought never again, at least in words, to have recalled them!”

The Abbess paused, raised one long thin hand to her brow, and closing her eyes, as she turned her face away from the sunlit outside view towards the inner part of the room. Her lip was quivering; and the colour, which emotion had called into her cheeks, and which made her look, Stella thought, exceedingly beautiful, gradually faded out.

Stella was profoundly touched, both by sympathy for the sorrows of a heart whose wounds the healing of twenty years of grave-like peace had so evidently failed to close, and by gratitude for the feeling which had led the unhappy Abbess to open to her the prison-chamber of her heart in the manner she had done. It was impossible for her not to feel keenly that henceforth there was a tie between their hearts, of a very different kind from any which Stella would have dreamed of being possible between herself and the Superior of her convent. From henceforth they were friends, woman's heart to woman's heart.

Stella took the other hand of the Abbess, which was hanging listlessly by her side, in both of hers, and raised it timidly to her lips, as she drew close to her companion's side, and looked up through her

tears into the quivering but tearless face of the Superior with an expression of tender sympathy, which was inexpressibly sweet to that poor lonely heart, withered by the atrophy of twenty years, yet still unconsciously athirst for human love.

"Thanks! dear child! Don't speak!—I know! —You have given a cup of water—so sweet!—in the name of the Merciful One, to a weary way-farer in the desert!"

And as she spoke, she put her arm around Stella's waist, and drawing her close to her side, stooped her face from her superior height, and folding the gracious young head to her bosom, pressed her lips to her forehead.

After a minute or two she spoke again :

"But, Stella," she said, in almost a whisper, "all that was not enough! It was not the worst—no, I think not the worst," she added, as if the poor lacerated heart were balancing one agony against another. "When my husband abandoned me—he *was* my husband!"—she interposed in a raised and almost defiant voice; and then continued in a low, piteous tone, scarcely above a whisper, "he abandoned not one poor ruined creature only!—I had a son! There, during those horrible weeks, while despair was freezing the blood around my heart, I was conscious of the new life within me! Oh, Stella, Stella, let us pray that few women may ever suffer the horror of feeling that con-

sciousness, which God has intended should be the most exquisite joy a woman's heart can know, turned into dread and agony, that shatters all her nature with its unnatural wrench! I was the mother of a son! He was taken from me—Oh! my heart!" she exclaimed, clutching her bosom with her hand, as if suffering the pang of a physical spasm—"he was taken away, when I was hurried to my convent burial—I was a mother! In all probability, I did not long remain so!"

"Alas! alas! what sorrow has been yours, my mother!" exclaimed Stella; "and were no tidings," she added, after a pause, "ever brought to you of him?" asked Stella.

"Do tidings come within these walls?" asked the Abbess, in reply; "do tidings come to the grave from the living world? Above all," she went on, with increasing bitterness, "do tidings of nuns' children reach them in their cloister! No, my child, no word of the babe that was torn from my bosom has come to me, from that long, long distant time to this day. And never before has my tongue spoken to living ear of that great undying grief!"

"But, my mother," said Stella, very timidly, after a pause of some minutes, "how could your husband—married to you—abandon you? And how could you, a married woman, be received into a convent?"

"My marriage was displeasing to the family of

my husband. I have told you that he was a wealthy noble. They made out somehow, I know not what, that the marriage was illegal,—that it was no marriage at all,—that the Marchese was free,—free to marry another woman,—as he did before the first tears of my agony were dry on my cheek !”

“Can such things be !” ejaculated Stella, dismayed at the tale unfolded to her ; “can it be, that a marriage made by Holy Church can be unmade to suit the pleasure of the rich and powerful !”

“Doubtless the law, man’s law, my child, was against me. There was some irregularity. The marriage was a clandestine one, according to the wishes of my husband. He made all the arrangements. I trusted to him, Stella ; trusted to his faith, his honour, his love, as I would trust my soul in the hands of its Creator ! And it was for the sake of the warning to you, my child, that lies in the bankruptcy of honour, faith, and love, that I have brought myself to speak of woes which have lain dumb at the bottom of my heart for twenty years ;—not for the sake of your sweet, loving pity, my child, though that is infinitely precious to me, but for the sake of the warning, Stella—for the warning !”

Stella shook her head with a grave expression of inflexible conviction, as she said :

“*Madre mia carissima !* It seems so ungrateful, so presumptuous of me ; I know that it must seem

so. And yet, *madre mia*, it would not be honest to you, nor loyal to my faith, if I suffered you to imagine that any such warning could avail anything with me. One worthless man wrecked your happiness. But if twenty thousand similar cases were told me, I should yet have made no step towards thinking it possible that my Giulio could be such an one !”

“Giulio again !” said the Abbess, dreamily.

“Yes ! *madre mia* ; Giulio is the name of him I love. Is it not a sweet name ? Giulio *mio* ! Giulio *mio* !” repeated Stella, clasping her hands, and pressing them to her bosom, as if for the mere pleasure of hearing the sound of the beloved name.

“And what is the cause which makes your guardians, my daughter, object to him so invincibly ?”

“I do not know that they would so invincibly object, my mother, if it were not for the prospect of that other hateful marriage. It is true that he is not rich ; and—and I believe—that is to say, I know—he told me himself—for he is the very soul of honour and candour,—that he is,”—and Stella lowered her voice to a whisper,—“what is called an illegitimate son.”

“Ha !” cried the Abbess, with a sharp, sudden look at Stella ; “of what country ?”

“He is a captain in the Piedmontese army, and has so greatly distinguished himself that he has

every reason to expect his promotion," answered Stella, unwittingly leading the Abbess into error by the indirectness of her answer to the question of what country her lover was. The latter, of course, had been prompted by a sudden thought, which had flitted for a moment across her mind, to ask respecting the native country of this *illegitimate Giulio*; but Stella's mind was naturally full of the circumstances which could present her lover in the most favourable light.

"Ah, Piedmontese," rejoined the Abbess, with a sigh; "but tell me, Stella, have you had opportunities of studying his character? Have you attempted to search below that surface which men can make so fair-seeming, while they are busy in the work of winning a woman's love? Have you tried to read his heart?"

The Abbess would have said that all that life of twenty years ago, with its every train of thought not less than its every thrill of passion, was as present to her heart and brain at that present speaking as it had been while it was actually passing. But had she sought to recal with accuracy the studies *she* had made of what lay beneath that surface which Cesare Malatesta had made—or which nature had made for him—so fair-seeming, she might, perhaps, have been reminded how great difficulty is found by maiden surveyors of such terri-

tories in distinguishing surface from sub-surface explorations. Stella, in truth, had proceeded at that critical moment of a woman's life, the giving of her first love, far more cautiously and less impulsively than Maddalena Tacca had done. More cultivated in intelligence and better educated, thanks mainly to her friend Teresa Palmieri, than the poor Bolognese widow's child, it was to be expected that she should do so. But Stella, gay, laughter-loving, light-hearted, little fairy, as she was at that time, had more sagely considered what she was doing when she gave her heart to Giulio Malatesta, than many a graver damsel does ere she abdicates the sovereignty of her own soul. Stella, as was said, in speaking of that period of her life, had "walked into love," and had walked with her eyes open. She was far more justified than the majority of girls would have been in replying to the questions of the Abbess.

"Indeed, indeed, *madre mia*, I strove to do so ; and I think I succeeded. And, besides, I have not only my own observation to go upon. I have heard much from others. I know how he has acted on other occasions. I know how he is esteemed by his friends and superiors. I know the nobleness of his feelings and opinions on the great questions which in these days ought to fill so

large a part of every Italian man's thoughts. I know——"

"All this is well, all excellently well, my eloquent little advocate," said the Abbess, placing her hand affectionately on Stella's head, and smiling with a pale sad smile as she looked into her face, for the moment bright with its former radiance from the eager emotion of her pleading—"all excellently well! But tell me, my Stella," continued the Abbess, with a pensive and almost dreamy sadness—"tell me if you know what your Giulio is as a son? That is a great test, perhaps the safest of all——especially——in such a case as his."

"Ah! *madre mia! madre mia!*" answered Stella, heaving a great sigh. "There you touch the greatest misfortune of my poor Giulio's life. He would be, I am sure, as sure as I can be of my own heart, that he would be such a son to an unhappy and unfortunate mother, as the happiest and proudest mother would think herself blessed in possessing! But, alas! he has never known his mother! It is the great unhappiness of his life!"

A sudden flush passed over the pale features of the Abbess, and she shot a rapid, almost scared glance at Stella. But the thought which had darted across her brain passed; the flush died out, and she muttered to herself rather than to her companion:

“A Piedmontese——”

“That is——” said Stella; but the Abbess, busy with her own thoughts, did not hear the interruption, and went on :

“But tell me, Stella, what makes you so certain that your Giulio would prove himself a good son?”

“How can I doubt it, my mother, when it is the great object of his life to discover her; when his greatest fear is that she may—alas! it is but too probable—have died without his ever having been able to pour the balm of a son’s love into the wounds of the heart that has suffered so much! Ah! *madre mia*, if that unfortunate mother could be discovered, there would be a consolation in store for her in the love of such a son that would make amends for all her past!”

“But have you ever considered, my child, or has he ever considered, what the finding of a mother under such circumstances might involve? He holds an honourable position—he seeks to win a wife who occupies a yet more distinguished position—he has already enough to struggle against in the fact of his unfortunate birth. Have you both considered what might follow from the discovery of a mother who might—nay, one may say, who would bring a heritage of shame and disgrace with her? Is he—are you both—brave enough to venture on the risks of all which such a

discovery might bring with it? Can your Giulio trust to his own feelings and conduct under such circumstances as the discovery he now sincerely wishes would be but too likely to entail? The risk would be a fearful one. And if I were interested in the happiness of such a marriage as you wish to make, my child—and why should I affect to deny that I am greatly interested in it, Stella?—I know not that I should wish that your husband's search for his mother should be successful. Her error has left him but too heavy an inheritance of evil as it is!”

“But why is it necessary, my mother,” urged Stella, “to suppose that there must needs have been disgrace or error? Consider, *madre mia*, the history you have confided to me of your own wrongs! Why may it not be that Giulio's mother was equally blameless and equally the victim of the wickedness of others?”

“My daughter!” shaking her head slowly, and with an infinite sadness in her eyes, “in this world disgrace does not follow misconduct only. It is often awarded to misfortune. My case was a peculiar one, from special circumstances hardly likely to be met with in another. It is most true that I had every reason to believe myself a duly wedded wife. But if the son, whom I bore to the Marchese Cesare Malatesta——”

She was interrupted as the words passed her lips by a scream rather than an ejaculation from Stella. She sprang to her feet as persons will sometimes do from the effect of a gunshot wound, but in the next instant had precipitated herself at the knees of the Abbess.

“What! what is it you say?” she cried, seizing both the Abbess’s hands in hers, pressing herself against her knees, and looking up with straining eyes into her face; “my mother! Oh! my mother!”

The strength of the sudden emotion was more than she could bear; two or three convulsive sobs came bursting up from her heaving breast, and then she fell into violent hysterical laughter. The Abbess, who understood that the discovery of the relationship in which she stood to the father of the man whom Stella’s family wished to compel her to marry was naturally a great, and perhaps a painful shock to the young girl, but who nevertheless was surprised at the intensity of the emotion she manifested, placed her in the great chair near the window, and endeavoured to calm her.

But it was some little time before she could sufficiently regain mastery of herself to speak; and when she did so, her words were too incoherent to explain at once to the Abbess the real nature of the discovery which she had made, and on the brink of which the Abbess herself was standing.

“Oh! *madre mia!*” she exclaimed, putting an intense expression into the words; and she would have again thrown herself at the feet of the Abbess, had not the latter insisted on her remaining in the chair; “*madre mia*, I am so glad! Oh! Giulio! he will be so happy! It seems impossible! But it is true—I feel that it is true!”

“My dear child,” said the Abbess, “you are labouring under some strange delusion. I had not intended to mention the name which for me sums up in its sound so many bitter memories; but it slipped from me; and it matters little. But do not imagine that the broken tie between the Marchese and me can in any way avail to save you from the pursuit of the son.”

“Oh, mother! my mother! *that* is not it. Don’t you see it? Giulio! Does your heart tell you nothing?”

A dim suspicion, a half-formed idea, a vague shadow of the coming truth, passed over the mind of the Abbess. It sent all the blood back to the heart, and fixed her, as she stood, pale as marble and as rigid.

“Speak!” she said, in a low hoarse tone; “for God’s sake, speak!”

“It is Giulio’s mother! My Giulio is your Giulio! Giulio Malatesta!”

* * * * *

And then it became the turn of Stella to soothe and calm the overwrought nerves of her companion. And then the two women fell into the sweet tears, and sweeter talk which grew out of the feeling of their new relationship ; and forgot for a while all the difficulties of the position before them.

And then they were startled by the sound of the convent bell ringing the hour of the Angelus, which reminded them that the boarder's audience of the Abbess had lasted the entire morning.

END OF VOL. II.



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